Summary

The 'Player' ventures out to the Canopy Kingdom in search of the legendary wish granting artifact, the Skull Heart, what the ignorant fool doesn't know is that his quest is pointless.
Ladies and Gentlemen, It's Showtime!

'Legend tells of an ancient artifact that can grant a woman's wish... The Skull Heart, however if she is impure of heart her wish will be corrupted and she will turn into an immensely powerful, twisted being of destruction... The Skull Girl'

The view pans out from the words detailing the story of the Skullgirl and shows a young man closing the book he was reading to place it inside the bag that was by his feet. The young man was a passenger on a large blimp-like ship carrying a variety of people inside.

"...What a load. Only granting the wish of a woman? I've never heard of a more sexist thing in my life." He huffed and crossed one leg over the other while resting his cheek in the palm of his hand, he sat by the window with his elbow on the window sill to his left.

Nothing but a sea of clouds since we left the ground. I was honestly hoping I'd get to see the world below as we traveled considering there's nothing else to do in this ship. Not even a movie. Well, anyway, I'm going to try and see if I can find this Skull Heart and make a wish for myself. What will I wish for? ...I dunno. I should probably fix that.

"What's all this talk about wish granting, man?" A little girl from the seating row ahead asked while looking down to him from the back of her chair she was standing up in.

He looks at her with a raised brow. "Excuse me?"

"You're going crazy back here and I'm trying to read my Skullygals comic! You know you were actually speaking aloud and not narrating, right?"

For a brief moment he gave an unreadable gaze at the young girl as if not wanting to answer her question, or possibly because he honestly couldn't recall whether or not he was monologuing to himself.

"Wow. Breaking the fourth wall this early? I can already tell this is gonna suck." He finally replied without answering her.

The girl gave him an annoyed glare before realizing he didn't look familiar. "Hey, you look kinda... different. I don't think I've ever seen you around before."

"That's because I'm new around here. My home is... very far away. I'll be living in the Canopy Kingdom for a little while. I'm searching for something. I'll get it and get out." He directs his attention back to the window, trying to dismiss the little girl with obvious signs of being uninterested.

The girl looked at him with an intrigued look "Oooooh, new guy?" she asked before forming a cocky grin. "Well you're not home anymore! It's a whole new world out here."

"I know." He replies unenthusiastically, still looking out to the clouds.

"My sister is actually the crown princess of the Canopy Kingdom."

The young man's eyes slightly widened at her sudden statement, he faced the girl with a puzzled look on his face. "Your sister is a princess? Wouldn't that make you a princess as well?"

She nods with a proud smile, giving her answer. "What's your name?"
"...I can't give out my real name but you can refer to me as 'The Player'.'"

"The player?" She repeated before placing her index finger upon her bottom lip, gesturing that she was in a questioning state of mind. "Eh. Whatever." She shrugs off her initial thoughts, showing she didn't think much of it. "I'm Umbrella, it would be wise to remember that. Now if you'll excuse me I have to use the little girl's room!"

She jumps out of her seat and runs to the back of the blimp to use the rest room. The Player simply shook his head and turned back to the boring view of clouds.

'How did I end up meeting a princess the day I decided to come out here? I hope she isn't a plot point...I just want to get this Skull Heart thing and make my wish. I tried looking for this other artifact that would grant my wish but it turns out there's seven of them scattered around the world and I'd have to talk to some dragon about my wish after gathering all seven. Screw that. This was much simpler. I hope I'm narrating to myself correctly this time.'

The thick clouds finally started to die down and the view of a large sprawling land could be seen in the distance.

The Player looked on in awe upon seeing it just ahead. The intercom at the front of the ship was beginning to turn on. "Good evening ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. We will be arriving in the Canopy Kingdom shortly. I repeat we will be arriving in the Canopy Kingdom shortly."

'First thing I'm gonna do when I get down there is look for a place to eat. I probably should've eaten before coming out on the flight...then again the flight attendant said it would've been a quick trip not this 24 hour nightmare with terrible service. I should get my money back...'

He stood up from his seat and looks to the rear of the ship for Umbrella but she was nowhere to be found. He sat back in his seat and checked his bag to make sure he had everything before the ship landed at port.

'Ok, seriously, she can't still be pissing...if anything I could've at least got her to show me around. Maybe even let her pay for a meal if we found a place to eat. Normally I'd get crap for letting a girl pay for it but she's a princess. She's rich! I ain't gotta feel bad about that.'

He took out a small book titled 'Canopy for Idiots' and turned a few pages before stopping on the section containing the information he was looking for.

'Ruled by the royal Renoir family, the Canopy Kingdom is a sprawling land of vast variety, with sights of beauty contrasted by realms of despair. King Renoir's ruthless war campaigns lead to explosive technological and cultural growth, but only through grave ethical and moral sacrifices.

Seven years ago, the world was engulfed in conflict, in what became to be known as the Grand War. Queen Nancy Renoir found the Skull Heart and wished for peace, but found herself transformed into the most powerful Skullgirl to date as a result. In the end, the three nations had to stop their war to team up to defeat the former queen – in the end her wish was granted, as an uneasy peace formed following her demise.'

"Well that sucks. While this Skull Heart thing does sound dangerous it doesn't say anything about turning any man into a Skullboy, and why is it that only women get to make a wish? Has any male tried making a wish upon the thing? Why don't the girls just make their wish but at the end say 'without turning me into the Skullgirl'? I guess as I'm walking I should watch for plot holes."
A couple of minutes later the flying ship finally made its landing at port. All the passengers inside gathered their things and walked out of the 3 doors available for exiting. The Player threw the bag over his shoulder and exits through the front.

"Comin' out and feelin' about 10 pounds lighter!" Umbrella came out of the bathroom speaking in a victorious tone. She was surprised to see that the ship was nearly deserted but even more surprised to see that the Player had left without her. She growled with an annoyed "Jerk..." came from her mouth.

The Player was already well on his way with the only thing to his name being the bag on his back. As he traversed the bustling streets, large airships, similar to the one he was riding on earlier, were soaring overhead in a most impressive display.

"Wow...this place is huge. I wonder where I should start to look for th-" Suddenly he was seemingly tackled by a mysterious figure in a black trench coat. The impact was enough to make both of them fall over. "Ack!" He grunts as he hit the ground. "Hey! What's the big idea?!"

After leaning up he looks around for the one who bumped into him and finds them lying flat on the ground beside him with the coat, seemingly, over their head. He removed the coat from over the pedestrian only to freeze up once he noticed there was no head attached to the body.

"There it is!" A feminine voice called out.

The Player's eyes slowly scrolled up to see a head moving toward him. The head was upside and had feline ears, using them to move about as if it was normal.

"Thank you for catching my body. It would've been a real CATastrophe if it got away." The severed head appeared to have a sense of humor by using a pun, failing to realize how horrified the person before her was.

The body on the ground started to move on its own and eventually sat up, rubbing the empty space on its shoulders as if scratching its head...which it was clearly missing.

"I'm down here!" The woman yelled out to the body which began to feel around before finally placing its hands upon the head.

After gripping it the body managed to put the head on its shoulders, the head and body were a perfect fit and connected to reform a wholesome woman.

"There!" She cheerfully stretched her arms out with a satisfied grin.

The Player was still looking on, frozen in disbelief with a dropped jaw and shrunken eyes.

The cat girl noticed his expression and finally decided to speak up on the matter. "Um-"

The player jumps back and pointed at the young woman. "Aaaaaahhhhhhh!" His screaming was nearly identical to that of a frightened prepubescent girl.

The confused feline woman simply tilted her head slight confusion with a soft "Meow?" coming out as her only response. Before she could say anything else The Player turns in the other direction and dashes through the crowd of citizens with no intention of looking back.

The more he ran the crazier things got. The sight of human-animal hybrids of this caliber was new to his eyes and enough to keep him running for the majority of the day, he continued running until the sun started to go down.
Now that he seemed to be in the clear from the bizarre he took the time to finally rest. He laid his
back up against a nearby wall and slowly slid down until he was sitting. He looks up to the sky while
trying to catch his breath.

"…What the heck is up with this place? What were those things?" His eyes started to drift around,
checking his surroundings. "…Uh, where am I?" His panic lead him to a small seaside-like town, he
sighs heavily once he realized he was now more lost than he already was. "Great. What am I
supposed to do now?"

Suddenly something caught his attention. He closed his eyes and slightly held out his nose to take in
a small whiff of the air.

"…Food." He said to himself, nearly drooling.

He got up and followed the scent, traversing the many laid out wooden platforms which acted as a
walking source for getting around the rest of the town that was submerged in water.

The Player carefully made his way until he found the source of smell he was attracted to, and much
to his joy it lead him to a restaurant.

"Hallelujah!" He exclaimed in delight. "Finally…a place where I can have a good meal! Hm, 'Yu-
Wan'…sounds Chinese, a Chinese restaurant. Now things are starting to look up." He smiled as he
pushed open the front door and closed it behind himself.

"Welcome sir!" A gentle voice called out to him as he walked in.

He turned to where he heard the voice and noticed another hybrid creature, it was impossible for him
to tell what exactly she was but she wasn't threatening in the slightest and yet he had that same
horrified look when he ran into that cat woman, most likely a force of habit at this point since he was
running and paniciking all day.

"Table for one?" She asked him politely.

The player's eyes widened, his jaw dropped and he pointed. "Aaaaa- actually…you're kinda cute."

"Huh?" She tilts her head curiously to his claim.

The Player shook his head, dismissing his own compliment to the young woman. He played it off as
if everything was fine. "I mean...yes. A table for one Miss-" He looked down to her name tag ",-
Minette."

The waitress, Minette, smiled brightly at him and nods. "Right this way please." She lead him to a
table near the window, placing down a menu and silverware for him. He sat down and pulled his
seat up to the table. "Have a look through the menu and see what you'd like to order today. As you
already know my name is Minette and I will be your waitress for today. If there's anything you need
just call me and I'll be right over!"

"Thank you." The Player responded pleasantly due to Minette's excellent customer service. She
bowed respectfully to him and went off to help another customer, leaving the Player to have a look
through the menu. "Such a nice, sweet girl."

"Ya hear the news?" A voice spoke up from a table not too far from where the Player was sitting.
"The Skullgirl's been going after all those families in Maplecrest…"

Hearing the name 'Skullgirl' quickly caught the Player's attention. He turned his head to the right and
saw two goons discussing the matter at their own table. He was careful not to make himself too obvious with his eavesdropping.

"Looks like this new Skullgirl's got a bone to pick with the boss." The second goon spoke up. "Where has he gone, anyway? Think the rumors of him getting sick are true?"

The Player placed his fist on his mouth in a thinking gesture. "Generic mafia goons. Talk about a pretty consecutive day: first the youngest princess of the Kingdom and now goons who know about the Skullgirl. If they know about her then they gotta know about the Skull Heart too. It won't be a smart idea to just straight up ask them about it, unless I want to end up in the trunk of their car. I wonder if there are any normal people out there who-"

Just as he continued to think to himself a commotion breaks out over at the goon's table. "Is everything OK over here? Are these guys bugging you, Minette?" A familiar voice asked.

The Player took another quick glance over to the noise and was shocked to see the cat woman from earlier. Just remembering the sight he saw earlier was enough to make him cringe in his seat.

"Go find yourself a sandbox, kitty – we're just havin' a friendly chat with the little minnow here." The first goon continued to harass the two ladies much to the Player's disgust. Seeing their uncouth behavior to the girls was almost enough to make him completely forget about the horrors he saw earlier.

"Leave now, or I'll throw you out myself." The feline woman spoke sternly.

The larger goon had his focus on the feline. "Can't you take a clue, you flea-bitten tart!?"

With how things were escalating the Player quickly found himself highly annoyed at the insults and rude behavior the older men were giving the younger girls. He slammed his fist on the table and stood up. "If there's one thing I cannot stand its generic bad boys taking advantage of ladies, let alone verbally abusing them, and I'm not gonna stand for this!"

"Clearly you don't know who you're messing with." The first goon continued on, not even acknowledging the Player, as he stood up with his hand on a hidden blade's hilt.

"Hey y-!" The Player was about to call the gangsters out but was stopped immediately when he saw the thug take out a large bladed weapon and swung it across the feline's neck, cutting her head clean off, blood gushing from her decapitated neck. The Player's built up tension diminished instantaneously as her lifeless body hit the floor.

"Ha, did you see that? That stupid cat didn't stand a chance."

The Player did a 180 to the nearest window with a serious case of 'Nope' all over his face. He got within a diving stance and leaped out of the window, landing on the wooden platform outside. He got up and ran as fast as he could away from the restaurant.

"WHAT THE HELL IS WRONG WITH THIS PLACE?!"

Later that night The Player eventually found himself wandering the bustling neon streets of the downtown area of New Meridian, the city was just as lively at night as it was during the day time meaning the city was rich with a night life scene. The Player managed to stumble upon a small café and went inside.
"Welcome sir." The owner behind the counter kindly greeted the young man. "Please, sit wherever you'd like."

The café was practically empty, there were only three costumers. Two adults, one male and one female, who were sitting together and a young lady who sat by herself, enjoying a milkshake. She was wearing a white and black school uniform, black thigh high socks and a hat of matching color to compliment her appearance.

The Player walks by the young lady and couldn't help but give her a glance from the waist down. He reached into his back pocket and took out a pair of black shades which he then placed firmly on his nose, the girl was pretty curvy and her backside appeared as a reflection in his glasses which prompts him to bite his lower lip and quietly mutter "Dat ass..." before sitting down on the other side of the counter.

He took the shades off and put them back where he got them, he doesn't actually own shades so it's pretty suspicious where he would even get a pair. Most likely a result from hammerspace.

As the Player reads over the café menu a familiar man approached the young lady while she was still enjoying her milkshake. The girl simply looks back to him with an uninterested gaze.

"Well, well, well...what have we here? What say I buy you a real drink, sister?" The man offered.

The Player noticed the man and was shocked to see him again, and acting so casually in public after being an accomplice to the gangster who decapitated the feline woman from earlier. The Player eyed him once more to make sure it was the same guy and it was. He quickly stood up and walked over to the two.

The man placed one hand on the girls cheek while the other had a firm grip on her thigh, she was obviously not keen on him touching her but before she could act a very masculine voice spoke up, "...We've already got drinks, thanks."

The man was surprised to hear the voice coming from the girl and raised a brow at the tone he thought was hers. "Uh...that's quite the deep voice you got there, little lady. But it's cool." He continued to play it off with his perverted intentions but before he could go any farther the Player quickly intervenes by grabbing the man by his wrist and yanks his hand off of the girl.

"MURDERER!" The Player called out before taking the teenager by the hand, making her get behind him.

"Um, excuse me? What are you talking about?" The perverted man questioned while looking genuinely lost.

The Player scowled at him. "Don't play dumb! You killed that woman in that restaurant and now you're walking around like you didn't do anything wrong! You cut her head clean off!"

The girl's eyes widened a bit at the Player's actions and wasn't expecting his sudden arrival. "Who are you...?" She asked softly but wasn't loud enough to catch his attention.

The man pondered for a bit before remembering what happened in the Yu-Wan restaurant. "Ooooh! You mean that fish and cat girl."

"That's right!" The Player exclaimed.

"Look, kid...you got it all wrong. Actually me and my buddy got our asses kic-"
Before he could explain the Player balled his fist and sucker punched the man across the jaw. The impact and force caused the pervert to spin around in a daze which would then go on to knock him out.

"Call 911!" The Player called out to the owner and waitress in the café. "He must be trying to hurt this girl…" He quietly stated to himself before turning to her with a firm grip on her hand. "You're not safe here!" He stepped over the man's body, dragging her along.

The café owner looked down at the unconscious pervert and made haste but instead of calling the cops he checked the man's pockets for money. After stripping him for everything he had the owner and waitress dragged him out to the café's back alleyway where they laid him out between trash bags on the side of a dumpster.

The Player successfully managed to get the girl away from the café by escaping into a remote part of the city.

"Are you ok?" The Player asked her as he came to a stop at a nearby corner.

The girl looks at him with a blank stare at first but soon spoke up, "Yes... I'm fine." she answered.

"Good. That guy was bad news. Based on how he was treating you I can only imagine what he had in mind."

"...Do I know you?" She asked innocently.

"Huh? Oh, no. I don't believe we've ever met. This is actually my first time ever coming to this kingdom and I'm looking for something."

"Oh. I see..." She sighs with her head slightly lowered, hinting at a bit of disappointment in his answer but she shook away her negative feelings in order to finish the conversation. "Thank you for handling that creep earlier, but I could've taken care of him. Um, what's your name anyway?"

"I'm...uh, you can call me 'The Player'."

Before the girl could respond the masculine voice from earlier suddenly spoke "Wow, your parents must've hated you. That's a dumb name." the girl grit her teeth and pulled down on her hat.

The Player was a bit confused after suddenly hearing the masculine voice. "Huh...? What was that?" He questioned.

"N-Nothing!" The girl protested as she kept a firm grip on her hat.

The Player smiled at her, confusing her actions with shyness. "And you are?"

"All I know is that my name...is Filia." She answered with a rather interesting choice of words.

"All you know is your name? I don't understand."

"Yes, that's all I can remember. I don't have any memories outside of that."

The Player took a slight step back from hearing her. "You've forgotten everything except your name?"

Filia gave a single nod in response.

"That sounds dangerous. If you have amnesia you shouldn't be wandering around out here. Have
you seen a doctor?"

"No. But I am looking for something that could help get my memory back. I don't really know for sure if it'll help but I'm willing to try anything. I've been searching for some time now and every lead I had proved to be false, to make matters worse there hasn't been anyone who knows me..." The look of disappointment resurfaced for Filia.

The Player couldn't help but feel sorry for Filia, he lightly frowned as she told him the story, there was an urge to help but what could he do? He didn't know anything about Canopy and being a foreigner meant he had to start from scratch, but maybe this was the door for getting started.

"...Hey, uh, don't worry. How about I help you find what it is you're looking for?"

"Huh?" She looks up to him, surprised by his sudden offer.

"Maybe I can help you, or maybe we can help each other. I'm looking for something too. If we come across someone who knows you they might refresh your memory. And who knows, maybe your memories can point me in the right direction."

Filia fluttered her eyes in sudden glee as the Player managed to re-ignite her hope. "You really think we can?"

"Absolutely. I'm sure someone knows you, we just have to look around."

Her eyes twinkled with an adorable smile complimenting her overly cute look. "Thank you! Uh, Player! And you, Samson...you've got to stop doing that. Whenever you have outbursts like that you draw attention to us!"

"Hmph, that creep was asking for it." The masculine voice from before spoke from out of nowhere once more. "No one lays a hand on my host...no one."

The Player scratched the back of his head, that manly voice sounded familiar but there was no one else around, to add onto this Filia was the one who initiated the conversation with the voice.

"Um, who exactly are you talking?" The Player asked.

Filia's hat started to move and her hair launched it into the air, two eyes formed at the top of her skull and a gaping mouth with sharp teeth formed after it.

The back of her head bit down on the hat as it was coming back down, proceeding to chew on it while the Player watched in horror. After eating the hat her hair grew in length and soon had a slim body of its own, even managing to stand up right. In height it stood taller than Filia, with its arms crossed. Filia was left to sway helplessly in the wind like a headband and a simple smirk to show she had no control over her hair as it confronts her new friend.

The Player stood in complete silence during the stare down with this unique creature.

"...Sup?" Her hair, Samson, spoke up to him with an upward nod of the head.

The only thing the Player did was drop his jaw, point and scream in terror much to the shock of Samson who rushed in to silence him by putting his hand over mouth so that they didn't divert any attention to their location.
After wasting valuable time trying to get the Player's panic attacks under control, which took up to an hour, Filia and Samson were finally able to settle him down and explain the situation in full and catch the newcomer up on their situation, they were now a party of three.

Now that the Player was acquainted with his new friend, Filia, and her parasite he was ready to help with her dilemma. The group stood in an alleyway to discuss their plans for the journey ahead.

"So, do we have any leads at this current time?" The Player asked Filia as he laid up against a wall with his arms crossed.

By the time Filia had met the Player she was already out of leads and had to rely on a source from her parasite, she may not have known anything but Samson did.

"...Well?" Filia addresses Samson.

"It's definitely in New Meridian…I can feel it." Samson answered feeling certain of himself. "Between all the Skullgirls sightings and rumors I think if we just look for trouble we're bound to run into someone who can lead us to what we're looking for."

The Player gave an uncertain look at Samson's claim and had doubts about causing a commotion for answers. "Um, you sure about that chief? Wouldn't it make more sense to be all…ninja style for this? Picking fights with random people will just draw more attention to us. You know, like, police attention?"

"Nobody asked you." Samson flagged off his concern.

"What? I'm just saying your plan is stupid and it doesn't make any sense." The Player defended his choice. "You don't have to ask me to see how dumb it is. 'Oh, I'm a hair demon thing and I'll just beat the crap out of everyone until some random pedestrian tells me what I want to know. I'm so smart, hur-derp!" The Player mocked Samson by poorly mimicking his tone.

Samson grit his teeth and started flailing about in a fit, because he was attached of Filia's head it forced her to jerk about, she grunts with each violent sway. "Kid, I will kick your ass!"

"I will drown you in shampoo!"

"Guys, stop it!" Filia raised her voice at the two in an attempt to get them to settle down.

"…HE STARTED IT!" Both the boys shout at the same time.

Filia sighs at their bickering, the two were older than she was but based on their interaction it was clear Filia was the mature one of the group. "Look…we're a team now so we have to work together if we want to reach our goals. How will we be able to make any progress if all we do is argue?"

The guy's remained silent and against one another, Filia knew it was going to be a tough journey. Samson huffed at them. "I still think my idea is better." He was still adamant in his choice.

"…Fine." Filia said hesitantly. "We'll do it your way."

The Player held out his arms as if asking 'Are you serious?' via body language.
"Ha!" Samson teased by sticking his tongue out.

"Samson is the only one who knows about the trail we're on so let's just follow his plan first. If it doesn't work out we can try something else, ok?"

The Player sighs and raised his hands in a 'whatever' gesture. "Alright, you win…but how exactly do you plan on going about this?"

Wasting no time Samson had took a form of his own: growing a body, arms and legs. He stood upright as Filia dangled behind him, Samson was a lot taller than Filia herself so her feet would naturally be off of the ground whenever Samson used this bipedal form.

He ran out into the streets, starting a street brawl with the biggest and toughest looking guys around leaving the Player to make haste and follow behind Samson's street fighting trail. The parasite kept this up for a while but at this point he was just having fun beating the crap out of everyone.

After defeating about 30 guys Samson reverted back to his regular form on Filia's head. He let out a sigh of boredom upon transforming back. "Can you believe that? Nobody knows nothin'. Guess those professional interrogations weren't much help."

"…Professional? You were just beating everyone senseless!" The Player replied. "They were unconscious before I could even ask any questions and you were so fast in picking fights I couldn't even ask them BEFORE they got wrecked."

"That was less productive than I thought, Samson…" Filia added.

Samson huffed with a cocky grin. "It's not my fault I'm a badass."

The Player simply rolled his eyes at Samson's statement. "You're an idiot."

"Aye! What was that?!" Samson asked in a rowdy tone.

The Player gave a mischievous smile, happy to see he made Samson lose his cool once again. "I-D-I-O-T: Idiot."

"Why you! I'll-"

Before the boys could start up another argument a disturbing presence was steadily approaching the trio, an almost inhumane looking creature inched closer and closer, creeping up from behind the Player on all fours.

"FIL-I-AAAAAAA!" It called out in a rather deep voice. Based on the sound of the voice, and look of the body, it was female.

The Player turned back to see where the sudden voice came from and upon seeing the creature that was crawling before him he jumps back. "AAAAAAAAAAAAAH!" He shrieked in fear, quickly retreating behind Filia. "What the hell is that thing?!" He asked in fear.

"I-I don't know…" Filia was just as unsure and surprised as he was. An uneasy feeling shivered down her spine.

Samson was a bit shocked to hear from this new girl himself as it seemed to know Filia by name. "…Get ready. Filia! I don't think we can get away from that thing."

The Player shrieked in an even higher tone from hearing that escaping wasn't an option.
"Ready, Samson! But why does it know me!?"

The monster girl was unlike anything Filia and the Player have seen before. There was a brown mask concealing the poor girls face, two large red circles replacing her eyes and a large blade attached to her back bearing a slight resemblance to a Japanese shuriken. She had a rather muscular body tone, wore tattered brown clothing and was barefoot.

"Must…Kill…" She muttered.

The Player was afraid but he didn't want Filia fighting this monster. His mindset of being the man of the group caused him to swallow his fear, thus rising from his cowarding position behind Filia. He felt masculine and pumped, ready for anything. "Don't worry, Filia! I got this one!" Without thinking he charged ahead.

"Hey, wait!" Filia called out in a panic as she watched him run recklessly toward the girl.

He continued to charge toward the girl with his hand clenched into a fist. "This thing is out for blood! But as I said, don't worry, Filia!" The determination on his face was fierce, his very being was burning with adrenaline as he leaped for the monster. He was ready! Absolutely determined to protect his friend. This was The Player's moment "There's no way she's gonna-!" until reality slapped the heroics out of him via the girl backhanded him in the face. He was sent flying off into a bundle of crates.

"Oh no! Player!" Filia cried out in horror.

"BWHAHAHA!" Samson laughed uncontrollably.

Filia ran as fast as she could to her fallen ally. "Are you ok?!"

"Where's the leak, ma'am…?" The Player asked himself in a complete daze amongst the broken wood.

Before Filia could get any closer the girl dashed over to her and swung the giant metal blade on her back toward the unsuspecting Filia who managed to jump back mere seconds before being sliced in half. Filia slide back upon having her feet touch the ground.

"Darn it!" Filia muttered behind her teeth.

"Hehehe, kid, as hilarious as it was seeing him get his ass kicked we have to focus on ourselves right now. If he's not dead we'll check on him after this. Got it?"

Filia's eyes drift over to the Player who was unconscious. She knew Samson was right about their current predicament and put her focus on the battle that was about to unfold. "Right…" She got into her fighting stance with a serious glare toward her opponent. "Let's go, Samson!"

"Hell yeah!"

Samson sprouted large wing-like appendages and used them to launch Filia forward at an incredible speed.

Filia cocked her arm back and threw a punch but the monstrous youth's quick reflexes kicked in and she placed her large metal blade in front of her, using it as a shield, thus having Filia punch the blade. The force from the impact only caused the girl to slide back a few feet.

"That's nothing!" She stated from behind the giant metal weapon which began to wind up until it
was spiraling around like a giant fan, powerful enough to blow Filia back.

Filia was sent flying from the strong winds, sliding across the ground until she hit the side of a building where she finally made her stop. "Gah!" She yelped upon impact, rubbing the back of her sore head. Filia opened her eyes to see where her opponent was only to find the vicious attacker was already standing in front of her with her fist coming down toward her, luckily Filia was able to roll off to the side before the girl could harm her.

The punch was so strong that a hole was punched into the building's side which was solid brick. Upon dodging and Samson surrounds Filia in a spikey ball, using the momentum of her dodge to make a quick U-turn and roll back to the girl who was prying her fist from out of the wall.

"Roll em up!" Samson shouted as the duo in the spikey hairball approached her.

The ball was too quick and she wasn't fast enough to react, the girl was tackled viciously by the massive hairball technique. She grunted as she was propelled back, hitting the ground as Filia hopped out from the ball formation.

"...Did we do it?" Filia asked as her opponent remained on the ground.

"Hurry, Filia! Let's get out of here before that thing wakes up!" Samson frantically replied as if he wanted Filia to avoid making any further conversation with the monster.

At first Filia didn't answer and remained stationary. "Samson...who was I? Why does this poor girl know me?"

"I, er...don't know. It's clearly insane-I wouldn't worry about it..."

The girl on the ground began to move once more, Filia hadn't noticed and remained quiet.

"...Damn it. She's getting up!" Samson exclaimed in a worried tone. "We need to get out of here!"

The girl could barely stand as she held her abdomen in pain from the hairball attack. "F-Filia...it's me! Carol!"

"Carol?" Filia questioned with a lost look in her eye.

A closer glimpse of the girl's face resulted in a few images of another person flashing through Filia's mind as if she was remembering a piece of her past.

A slew of images rushed through Filia's head, who was now staring into space as the images filled her mind. Apparently...something snapped, Filia had achieved a piece of memory by remembering the girl 'Carol'.

"Carol?" She questioned once more but with a look of familiarity. "Is that really you?"

Before 'Carol' could even answer she turned the other way and made an escape.

"Wait, Carol! Don't go!" Filia called out to the mysterious youth but it was no use, she escaped into the shadows. "...She's gone." Filia sighed in disappointment but she had an injured friend to worry about, she rushed over to the Player and pulled him out from the crates and laid him out on the ground. "Do you think he's ok?"

"Maybe he's dead." Samson stated in a casual manner.

"Samson!" Filia's nerves were already bad at this point so she wasn't uninterested in hearing
Samson's negativity…or humor, it was kinda hard to tell the two apart with him.

She tapped the side of the Player's face in an attempt to wake him up, this seemed to work since his eyes were beginning to twitch, showing that he was still alive.

"Yes! He's waking up!" Filia happily cheered.

"Damn it! He's waking up!" Samson said alongside Filia. These two were clearly opposites.

The Player groans in pain, his eyes flutter open to Filia's face.

"Are you okay?" The smile on Filia's face widened seeing him awake.

"Filia…oh man. I had the strangest dream. This thing…it just came outta nowhere and then-"

"You got your ass kicked?" Samson interrupted. "That wasn't a dream. You really got your ass handed to you."

"Wait, that was real? What happened to that thing that hit me? Is it still around?!" The Player wrapped his arms around Filia, frightened.

Filia giggled and gave a small pat to his head for reassurance. "No, she's gone. Don't worry."

After another look around the area, the Player could see their attacker was indeed gone. He released his hold from Filia and stood up with a straight look upon his face. "Pfft! Yeah, she better be gone because she wouldn't want to be around when I had gotten back up."

"Oh please…" Samson rolled his eyes at the Player's sudden tough guy act now that the danger was gone.

Filia couldn't help but laugh at the boys. The two might've not liked each other but they had some pretty humorous exchanges when they decided to talk, or at least for her.

"So, what do we do now?" The Player asked.

Filia's smile from a moment ago turned into a more serious look once she heard his question. "That girl, Carol, she knows who I am…"

"She does?" The Player asked sounding a bit surprised. "Did she help get your memory back?"

"When she told me her name I had a few faces pop into my head suddenly. I'm not sure if they were memories or not but those people I saw were familiar. I have never seen them but they weren't strangers from this feeling I got."

"Then…she may be the key to helping us getting all of your memories back."

"Maybe…"

Samson sighed at their conversation. "Just great… No talking you out of this now, huh?"

"Sorry Samson, but I need answers." Filia replied to her parasite who seemed against the idea. "We're going to follow her."

The Player crossed his arms while holding an amused smile on his face.

"Hm? Is something funny, Player?" Filia asked curiously when seeing his expression.
"You know everything about this entire situation, don't you, Samson?"

Samson's eyes shot open from the Player's sudden question. "W-What?! No!"

"Yes you do." He said with the same smile.

"Listen…kid! This is…I- You don't know what you're talking about! Just keep quiet and let the grownups speak…"

"I'm calling it."

"What?" Samson asked.

"I'm calling it, right now. That's all." The Player was now smirking confidently.

Filia became a bit suspicious as well, siding with the Player on the topic though she hadn't said anything. She noticed Samson has been acting a bit strange when it came down to Carol during their encounter.

"Samson?" She finally confronted him.

"Don't listen to him, Filia. He's a crackhead."

The Player remained quiet, only nodding his head with what now seemed to be a near permanent smirk, he was still holding his beliefs in high regard. "Mhm." He casually replied.

"Let's just go!"

Samson took to his bipedal form and ran into the city. The parasite could sense the girl's presence and followed the trail while doing his best to avoid contact with people, the Player did his best to keep up with Samson's impressive speed.

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The bizarre trail Carol left behind eventually lead them to the 'Grand Cathedral'. The Grand Cathedral resembled a traditional Catholic church, with white marble walls, large stained glass windows and ornate frescoes.

Samson reverted back to his normal form on Filia's head as they reached the church's front door.

"This should be the place…I can feel her in there." Samson stated to Filia and was quite certain of himself.

Slowly coming up behind them was the Player, he was finally able to catch up to them. He slouched over with his hands on knees, panting. "Hey! Don't worry…I'm here…phew."

"Are you alright?" Filia asked.

"Yeah…I'm good. Just…need to catch my breath."

"Samson, you shouldn't have run so fast if you had the trail. We nearly lost him back there."

"That's the idea." Samson quickly replied. Based on his tone there wasn't a care in the world for him.

The Player took a bottle of water from out of his bag and took a long drink, nearly finishing the bottle in one go but stopped halfway through. He pulled the bottle away from his mouth and gave a refreshing sigh.
"...Douche." He muttered under his breath as he swiped his forearm across his mouth. "Is this the place?"

"Yeah. Samson said he can sense Carol in there."

The Player took a step back to get a good look of the building. "Damn. Is this a church or a mansion? Hm...I wonder why she would even come here. Maybe she had some sins to confess?" He cautiously opened one of the church's large double doors and peeked inside.

The church was empty, the only souls present were two women and, of course, Carol.

Filia peaked into the church from the opposite door. "There she is..." She whispered.

Carol was on her knees before a rather tall nurse looking woman. "Another failed experiment - time to shut you down, Painwheel!" The nurse had spoken down to the injured and defenseless Carol.

"Painwheel?" The Player questioned, now looking over to Filia who was focused on what was happening in front of them. "I thought you said her name was Carol."

Without thinking Filia suddenly charged through the front door and entered the church.

"Wait, Filia!" The Player called out to her but it was too late.

Filia pointed her index finger at the tall blue haired woman. "Leave her alone!" She demanded with a fierce look in her eyes.

Carol looks over her shoulder with a hand on her head as if trying to control a headache. "...Filia? You remember!"

"Hmph, the amnesiac finally rears her pretty..." The woman stops as she notices the parasite attached to Filia's and smirks "-Heads."

The Player ran inside the church and stood behind Filia. "Don't worry Filia, I got your back-" He cut himself short having noticed the blue haired woman standing before them. He was struck in awe by her beauty and his mind almost completely changed from supporting Filia to getting a good flirt going. "Oh my damn! Hellooooooo, nurse!"

The woman raised an eyebrow at the young man, not expecting his presence. "And you are?"

"I'm whatever you want me to be because I wanna be yours. You fine as a mother f-!"

"P-Player!" Filia shouted to him in a somewhat irritated tone at his flirty ways toward the older woman rather than focusing on the business at hand.

Shouting his name seemed to spark an interest in Valentine who appeared familiar with it. She looks at him with a curious eye.

"While I agree she's pretty smokin' now's not the time..." Samson added.

"Idiot!" Painwheel scowled.

The Player flinched at the negative feedback he had gotten and tried thinking of a way to fix it. "I mean...who are you! Yeah...that's it..." He sheepishly played it off.

The woman smiled at the group from behind her mask, "Valentine." she answered. "I must say I wasn't expecting your arrival, 'Player'. Seems we have a new addition to the pot. What should we do,
"The Skull Heart can answer all of your questions, dear Filia." The Nun woman, Double, had spoken up from behind Valentine. "It will reveal to you everything. "Who you are, why you're here…what you're running from, it can do that and so much more. Anything you desire."

The Player slightly cocked his head to the side showing that he was a bit confused. "The Skull Heart? Wait, Filia, you're after the Skull Heart?"

She turned back to her friend and nodded. "Yes, it's key to what I need for getting my memories back." She turns back to Double and Valentine with a willful look on her face. "And…it's here?"

"Indeed." Double answered. "The Skullgirl herself awaits below."

"That sounds like something that needs to be, or should've been, kept secret." The Player's voice randomly spoke up in the background.

"…But only if you prove yourself worthy!" Double continued speaking as if the Player never said anything about the reveal of the Skullgirl.

The Player chuckled and placed his hand on Filia's shoulder with a confident grin on his face. "Bring it on! We can handle anything you throw at us!"

Double smiled at them and opened her mouth which expanded beyond human limitation. Sprouting out from her mouth was a fleshy like form that turned her completely inside out, having a more horrifying and distorted form beyond Painwheel. She was the definition of the word 'monster', making Filia shiver at the sight.

The Player was frozen in place with that same confident smile, complete with a brief stare to make sure he was seeing correctly and he was. "Oh well, I tried. So long Canopy Kingdom. Goodbye wishes, goodbye ambitions. It was nice to have a goal while it lasted!" He turned around and casually made his way for the exit.

"H-hey, where are you going…?" Filia had asked out to him as she noticed he was about to leave.

"I'm going home. I may have seen a lot of things during my time here but THAT is a bunch of Nope my friend. Nope, nope, nope!"

"But we're so close to getting my memories back and we can help you find what you're searching for!"

"Nope. Not worth it."

Before The Player could reach the exit the floor below him gave in causing him to plummet into the dark abyss below the church leaving his screams of horror to echo throughout the dark hole in the floor.

Filia was shocked to see him fall but before she could do anything a tentacle circled around her leg, grabbed her ankle and dragged her toward Double.

Below the church the Player had fallen into an underground catacomb where he was laid out upon a floor of human skulls. He sat up and rubbed the back of his head.

"Ugh, what the hell was that? The floor just gave out…I should sue whoever built this place."
He looks around and realized what was around him. He quickly stood up and backed away until his back was against the wall which had shelves that housed skulls within them. Seeing this he backs away from the wall and stood in the center of the room.

Soon the skulls started to move and with their movement they were being pieced together by the remaining bones to form human skeletons.

"Oh my god, this is quickly turning into every horror movie I've ever watched. I'm alone, trapped in a dark place with no weapons and no possible way of escape…could this get any worse?" The newly formed skeletons were magically granted weapons, swords and guns alike, answering the Players question. "Why did I have to open my mouth?"

The skeletons were now on the move, walking toward the cornered young man.

'Ok, God? I know I've done some stupid things in the past, and I probably only agreed to help Filia get her memories back so I could get the Skull Heart, BUT if you help me survive this I will change my ways!'

The skeletons drew closer and closer, readying their weapons to strike the defenseless male.

'I'll go to church every Sunday, I'll confess all my sins…I'll even sponsor a poor child in need!' - "JUST PLEASE! SEND ME A SIGN!" He shouted out as he curled into a defenseless ball.

Suddenly all of the skeletons stopped moving just inches away from him. They turn around and dropped their weapons, slowly making their way toward the darkest section of the room, fading away into the darkness while quietly chanting "Lady Marie…"

The Player opened his eyes to find himself still alive and the skeletons gone. He stood up with a puzzled look on his face and shrugged. "Oh. Never mind, God. They went away."

"I've been expecting you." A voice from the shadows spoke to him.

The sound of approaching footsteps echoed in the empty room. The Player braced himself for the worse.

"Now what…?" He closed his eyes in fear of another unnatural horror revealing itself to him.

Stepping before him was a young girl dressed in maid attire. Her eyes were red with unique skull designed pupils.

The Player opened his eyes once more to see the girl standing before him. "A loli?" He asked himself aloud.

"My name is Marie and you, I take it, are the new Player."

"What?"

"It has been many years since the last Player has ever set foot within the Canopy Kingdom. I must say it is an honor to be within the presence of a mighty deity such as yourself."

The Player was confused by what Marie was going on about, looking at her as if she was crazy. "Look…um, if you've been following me or something I only chose that alias because I thought it was cool. My real name is-"

"You mustn't speak your real name here. It isn't safe."
"Oh my god…I don't want to be a key feature in any complicated scenario here! I just want to make a wish and be on my way."

"Wish?" Marie asked sounding puzzled.

"Yes. The Skull Heart does the wish granting thing, right?"

"…Well, yes. But…you're a male. The Skull Heart."

"Only grants the wish of a woman, so I've heard, but I want to ask it why. I've been through hell today, I'm not leaving empty handed."

Marie looks at the Player in concern, and while she didn't want to seem rude she couldn't help but express herself as such when hearing his statement. "You…are a unique one. Are you even aware of your power?"

The Player shook his head. "Nope, I don't want to either."

"You have the ability to share the power of victory with those who dwell outside your own world. You are the key to solving our world's greatest mysteries." Marie began to explain anyway. "When you bestow the power of victory onto those you're close to you build upon it and with it you gain the ability to do anything."

The Player crossed his arms and began thinking to himself. "So I'm Victini?"

"AAAAAAAH!" A pain filled scream echoed from above the dark room followed by loud crash. The Player and Marie look up to the source of the noise but there was only darkness.

"Oh crap! I forgot Filia was still up there with that monster…"

"Go. Save your friend and uncover the mystery of the Skull Heart and this kingdom. The answer to what you seek lies within you, almighty Player."

A long stairway materialized before the Player, it lead to a secret doorway that would get him back to the Grand Cathedral.

Marie disappeared once he gained access to the higher levels.

"But I don't wanna be important!" He cried out helplessly.

Filia was outmatched by the Double and laid bruised on the church's floor. Double's monstrous form slowly 'walked' over to the defeated Youth who was breathing heavily on the floor.

"I'll gladly accept your tithe...in blood." Her disturbingly distorted voice had spoken out to the weak and frightened youth.

Filia's eyes were barely open as she only saw the bottom section of the monster approaching.
"Sorry…Samson…"

"Damn it, kid…!"

It was over for the young fighter. She had met her match to the powerful and dangerous shape shifting entity.

Double took the form of a giant hand with a gaping mouth on its palm. The mouth opened up,
suggesting the intent on devouring Filia, but before its jaws could feast Filia was grabbed at the last second by the Player, who rolled over to the side with Filia held close.

Upon retrieving the beaten schoolgirl the Player stood up with Filia in his arms. He looks down to her, a bit discouraged from nearly abandoning.

The weakened Filia opened her eyes and saw him. It wasn't much but she mustered a faint smile on her bruised face. "You came back…?" She muttered before passing out.

He was barely able to look at her, there was obvious signs he was shouldering a large amount of regret. His gaze turned to Double, the mere sight of her was enough to make him nauseous.

Double's disfigured body reverted back to her human self. A creepy smile took shape on her face as she opened her eyes to reveal nothing but the color red. "And so we meet again, Player."

"…Look, I'm not here to fight. I just want to get my friend home."

Double remained quiet, holding her smile at the Player who now began to back away. Her lack of responding only sent more chills up his spine, making him feel incredibly uneasy,

"Right…so, we're going now."

"…The Trinity has deemed you worthy. We will meet again, young chosen one." Double placed her hands together and closed her eyes, it appeared she was mimicking a prayer.

The Player just turned around and made a sprint for the exit.

"STOP REMINDING ME THAT I'M GONNA BE IMPORTANT!" He cried out as a trail of dust followed behind him.

The Player made it back to the heart of New Meridian, he was a bit winded from running as fast as he could from the Grand Cathedral and with Filia no less, who was a bit heavy for a young girl. His day was bizarre as ever and he didn't get a chance to rest since he arrived in the kingdom.

He traveled around until he found a few apartment complexes to keep a roof over his head, so at least some good came out of today. He didn't want to take Filia to a hospital because of Samson, there was no telling how doctors would react to the parasite, so he planned to care for her himself.

Among the many high end complexes the Player came across 'Poorman Apartments', the only place in the city he could actually afford, it was all in the name, how convenient.

He was able to get them a spot after a bit of negotiating with the landlord and carried Filia all the way up to their suite: 3rd floor, room 309. Once inside he took her to the upstairs one bedroom they had which was upstairs.

"PHEW!" He let out a sigh of relief upon finally laying her down.

The Player wiped the sweat off of his forehead and took off Filia's shoes, tossing them on the floor at the foot of the bed. He left the room to find a few medical supplies and was relieved to discover a first-aid kit containing all the essentials in the hall closet.

He ran warm water over a rag in the bathroom and returned to the room where he wiped Filia's face with the rag, he then went on to treat the girls wounds with the first-aid and wrapped bandages around the bigger bruises she had on her body. Filia was patched up to the best of his abilities.
After treating her wounds the Player was too tired to even move. He slides down on the carpeted floor and closed his eyes, drifting off to sleep right beside the bed.

…

However, in an unknown location all the events that transpired were carefully being observed by a much higher power.

In an undisclosed location a TV displayed the title 'Skullgirls' as two women were sitting before it with one holding an arcade stick in her hand as if she was playing a fighting game.

These two adult women were surrounded by countless books, posters, rubble, electronics and even prehistoric bones, all of which were fit inside what seemed to resemble a bedroom, albeit twisted and distorted. This area couldn't possibly exist on the planet and was most likely an alternate dimension of some sort.

"It's all…a bit like a game to me-" The woman holding the arcade stick spoke. "It's a device that fell from the 21st century, and I find that it helps me trace the branching threads of fate on the other side."

"A 'joystick'?'" The other woman asked. "With a name like that, you'd think they'd be a bit more… exciting." She eased up behind the one holding the arcade stick in a rather seductive fashion. "Maybe you're doing it wrong – What if I…?"

"Calm down, sister – you'll have your fun in due time."

Suddenly the door to their 'room' opened as the shadowy silhouette of an older woman appeared on the wall of the girl's room. "Girls, dinner is ready!" She called out to them. "Stop playing and come eat dinner before it gets cold!"

"One second, mother – I just need to save my game!"

The view pans over to a look of the wall collection the two seemed to have: pictures, books, wall scrolls, VHS tapes and more was plastered everywhere.

"Before we go, I'll tell you this – each branch is history that might have been. However, there is one timeline where all threads converge…including our own. This current timeline, however, is an interesting one. I'm interested in seeing how this one will turn out. 'The Player' holds the mightiest power of all within our world, in every timeline. And with a new one returning he's sure to entertain us. Who knows…maybe we'll even get a chance to fight him."

"Now THAT sounds like fun – I can't wait to get out of here!"
"Insufferable bugs. None of these will do." A mysterious man shrouded in a black aura expressed frustration toward multiple failed experiments he was working on prior to his introduction, "...No, wait! I have it. I know what EVERYONE loves...clones...no...palette swaps!" Suddenly lighting flashed, blinding the area in a white flash for a brief moment. "Come, my Futakuchi-onna!"

Descending from the sky was the figure of a girl, a familiar one that was already pretty well established. She landed in front of the heavily shadowed man and stood before him with a blank stare. She was literally the physical doppelganger of Filia but with a darker skin tone and green hair.

"Hehe. Perfect! With this new form you will be my latest and ultimate creation! And with your power I will be able to accomplish anything I want! Let's not waste any time, my new creation, the future of my vision awaits…

The area grew cold and a heavy darkness began to shroud the field of view, ultimately resulting in everything fading to pure black. There was no telling what was to become of the Canopy Kingdom if this antagonistic individual got his way. Whatever his vision foretells it was bound to be bad.

**One week later**

The man was resting comfortably in his urban home. He sat on the sofa reading the 'Daily Canopy' newspaper, sipping on a nice hot cup of coffee between page flips. Filia's doppelganger, who was maintaining the same blank and emotionless gaze, came downstairs.

"Dad. There's a party being held downtown and all my friends are going to be there. I'm gonna go out too."

The man put the paper down and turned to her. "Its past curfew for you, young lady. You won't be going anywhere I'm afraid. You have school in the morning."

"I wasn't asking your permission. I'm going out and I don't know when I'll be back." She made a brief stop by the coatrack, taking her jacket and putting it on.

The man stood up from the sofa with a furious look. "Fukua!" He shouted, revealing her name, "I said NO and that's final! I have had it with your rebellious attitude, you're ruining my dreams of being a father!"

"That's sad and everything but I don't care." She left the house, not caring at all how her 'father' felt afterward.

Seeing he had no control over his creation he fondly dubbed his 'daughter' the man breaks down and begins to weep uncontrollably. "Why am I so alone?" He shouted while curled up in ball formation.

While that guy settled down in his own despair Fukua was making her way to the party she mentioned before. She walked down the sidewalk of the Maplecrest suburb...or at least what looked like Maplecrest. There was a bloodshot sky with rushing dark clouds overhead, haunting monochrome buildings, and ghostly apparitions of the people and animals which roam the streets. As she reached the corner she was knocked over by someone who was clearly in a rush, this person was revealed to be the Player who jumped back from the suddenly collision.

"Oh! Crap. Sorry, I didn't mean to- ...Wait, Filia?" He took a closer glance at the girl to make sure he was seeing the right person and physically, yeah, it was Filia.
Fukua remained on the ground, rubbing her backside as she looked up to him. "Who is this Filia you speak of? I am Fukua."

"I guess you do look kinda different but aside from a few color differences you look just like her...you even have Samson on your head."

The parasite on her head moved his eyes up so that he could see The Player. "Samson? Get your eyes checked, friend. My name is Shamone."

"Shamone? Like from 'Bad' by Michael?"

Fukua and Shamone stared at him with emotionless eyes. Their glares made the Player feel a bit uneasy, but after realizing she was still on the ground he extended his hand out to help her.

"Um, anyway, I'm sorry about that. I wasn't really paying attention to where I was going."

Fukua ignored his hand and got up on her own, taking another gander at him. "I have never seen you before."

"Huh?"

"What is your name?" She asked taking a step closer to him, practically getting up close to his face with the same dead eyes. The distance between them made the Player back away from her.

"People just call me Player but I need help. I kinda don't know where I am. I just woke up here and this place is really twisted and...well, I'm just not supposed to be here. It's like a whole new world."

"Oddly enough it feels as if we've met before. Even your name, 'Player', seems to ring a bell. As if we once slaughtered thousands together."

Her emotionless and dull attitude followed by her choice of words was beginning to make the Player a bit uncomfortable. "Um... Ok. So, it appears you don't really know much about my situation and I apologize for taking up your time, uh, Fukua?"

"Correct."

"Right. Well, uh, you're kinda creeping me out so I'm just gonna go. No offense." He held out his hand once more, gesturing a friendly handshake, hoping she wouldn't end up bringing harm to him if he shows positivity.

"You believe I am creepy and made me feel things I've never felt during the week that is my existence. You amuse me. I will make you mine." Before the Player could react he found himself handcuffed to Fukua. "Come, we have a party to attend."

The Player remained silent as he was dragged along by the doppelganger of Filia but just as he realized what situation he was in he desperately tried freeing himself but to no avail.

Not too long after their meeting they arrive at the scene of the party which was being held in a dark and abandoned warehouse. It was full of ghost like beings with a few normal teenagers here and there. While heavy death metal music played Fukua took the captive Player to the farthest end of the building where two teenage girls, physically around the same age as Fukua, were sitting around in a circle passing around a can of paint and a sock.

"I have arrived." Fukua plainly stated to the group.
One of the girls flipped the hair from over her eye when seeing Fukua. "Hey…" She greeted in a depressing mood. She was dressed in all black, with fishnet gloves.

"Fukua! I'm glad you made it! Oh! And you brought another sacrifice!" A more cheerful girl spoke up dressed in a jester costume.

"Sacrifice…?" The Player began to worry about his well being even more, it seemed to get worse and worse by the minute.

"At ease my feeble kitten-mitten." Fukua turned back to her friends and pushed the Player forward. "This is my mate. We met just a few moments ago but we were made for one another. He called me creepy, a wise compliment." she was completely unenthusiastic when explaining this, almost as if she didn't care.

The cheerful girl clapped with over enthusiastic joy. "How romantic! My name is Bella!" she shook the can of paint in one hand and with it sprayed the sock she had in the other. She then held the sock up to her nose and gave a hefty snort which gave her a sudden boost of energy. "WHOO-HOO!"

"Sup, I'm Pain…" The girl dressed in all black attire introduced herself while flipping her hair to the side once more.

Fukua sat down, forcing the Player to sit down with her. She took the sock from the hyperactive but clearly high Bella and passed it to the Player. "Want to get f**ked up?" She offered.

"No... No thanks."

Shamone extended his hand out and took the sock from Fukua. "Hmp. Suit yourself." The sound of him sniffing heavily was enough to make the Player cringe uncomfortably. "Maaan...this is the good $#!&" Shamone began coughing.

"Now. Tell me more of your situation." Fukua gave another small glance at the Player showing that she was pointing her question to him.

"...Long story short my friend, Filia, lost her memories. I didn't want her wandering the streets with amnesia so I agreed to help find some people who may know her. Unfortunately when we did manage to find someone it was this terrifying monster girl and she knew Filia by name and introduced herself as Carol but she ran shortly afterward so we chase after her. Our search lead us to this church and once we got there we ran into these two older women, I fall through a hole in the floor, met this other girl who said I was some kind of key, Filia got in trouble, I rescued her and took her to safety. Once we got home I laid down and all I remember is falling asleep."

"Wow! That's some story!" Bella shouted as she began to get a whiff of gasoline in a cup.

The Player squints his eyes and looks on disgusted at Bella's actions but he chose to ignore the sight of her gasoline huffing. "Pain, you actually look just like the psycho Filia and I ran into...you just have a different color scheme going on."

Pain slowly blinked with her half-lidded eyes. "Life is like a turtle...slow and a waste of time."

"It's like I'm in a parallel universe or something and everyone here is replacing the one's on the other side. What the hell is going on here and what happened to Filia?"

"You seem awful fond of this 'Filia' girl." Fukua made note as she looked at the Player. "You even rescued her from the sweet release of death. Is she special to you?"
"She's my friend right now but the story might develop her into my love interest or something. Kinda hoping that doesn't happen."

Fukua continued to look at him with her emotionless stare. "I will hunt her down. If anything were to ever arise I will hunt her down and murder her. I will hang her decapitated head over my fireplace as a trophy, then cleanse you with my blood and rid your mind of her with the horrors of what I will do to you for cheating." She placed her hand upon his head and pat him, still no emotion. "You understand, my kitten-mitten?"

The Player could only look back at her in horror, disturbed she was maintaining her emotionless glare as if what she was saying was normal. It was clear he was already afraid of Fukua and desperately wanted things to go back to normal.

"….Shamone, pass me that paint." He asked upon giving in to fear.

**A few hours later**

Fukua came back home, kicking the front door open while carrying the Player, who had too much paint, over her shoulder. The sound of the door getting kicked in made the shadowy man jump up from the couch.

"Father, I am home."

"Fukua! It is way past your bedtime, where have you been?"

"I told you I was out at a party."

"Yeah? Well I- Wait, is that a...BOY?"

"Indeed." she blinked dully at him.

"Missy...you are in so much tro-!"

She began to head upstairs, still carrying the Player over her shoulder as if he was nothing. "Go sit on a popsicle and cool off, father."

The man remained quiet, emotionally shattered inside from his daughter's verbal abuse but the sound of her door closing made him come back to his senses.

"...A-And don't come out of your room until you reflect on what you've done!" She was already heading for her room anyway thus making his demands void of meaning.

Fukua laid the Player down in her bed and unlocked the handcuffs. She undressed herself down to her underwear before proceeding to sit on top of him in a saddling position. She tapped his face repeatedly in an attempt to wake him up.

"….Mmmm, w-what? What happened? ...Fukua?"

"You passed out from sniffing too much paint."

He took a quick look around to discover a neat and tidy room with pink wallpaper and cute stuffed animals lying about, this was very odd considering Fukua's personality, needless to say it was shocking for the Player and left him a bit confused. "W-Where are we?"

"Do not worry. We are home."
"...Why are you in your underwear?"

"You will be giving me your love child."

Wide eyed the Player blinked frantically as she began to lower her face down to his. Outside the door the man in shadow was coming upstairs after turning everything off downstairs. As he walked pass Fukua's door he heard loud bed rocking coming from Fukua's room. He approached the door and knocked twice.

"Fukua, is everything ok in there?"

"HELP! HELP! HELP! HELP!" The Player yelled out from the other side of the door.

Too afraid to confront his daughter in the matter, whatever it may have been, the man continued to strut pass the door as if he heard nothing. "Well, goodnight dear. I'll see you in the morning."

With one final shot of the house from the outside the light to the master bedroom was on for a brief moment before turning out, signifying the owner was on his way to bed for a good's night sleep...though god only knows what was going on in the other room.

The next morning Fukua, the man and the Player were all gathered together at the kitchen table with breakfast being served. The Player was a mess, he had a messy bed head and bags under his red colored eyes, anyone could guess that he's been up all night.

"Eat my feeble kitten-mitten, you will need nourishment for the day I have planned."

"I-I just...wanna go ho-home...I just..." He was barely forming complete sentences as he tried to stop himself from weeping but to no avail.

"Cheer up. In a few months we'll have a family of our own."

The father looked over at Fukua. "A family?"

"Yes, father. I made a man of him and soon he will father my child. We will rule this world together in an eternal depressing bliss."

"That's... That's absurd! You can't get pregnant!"

"We have completed the mating process. I'm sure I can."

The Player slowly turned a frightened gaze over to the man, sniffing uncontrollably. "You... You just stood there and let it happen... You could've stopped this but...but you didn't... You practically just watched it…"

"No! She can't get pregnant because of that. She can't get pregnant because none of this is real!"

There was temporary silence.

"What?" The Player questioned with his head tilted slightly to the side.

"None of this is even happening. " He continued to explain. "Fukua is the clone of a girl from the Canopy Kingdom and I brought her to life here, in the dream world, to see what it would be like if I was a father, and it honestly sucks. I make clones of people in the real world and make copies of them in the dream world to make a bunch of 'what if scenario's' for myself because I'm lonely in my real life. In fact you're not even here right now, boy. You're just a dream version of yourself back in the real world."
The Player just sat there, unable to grasp the concept of what the # $% was going on… Fukua and the man simply turned their heads to the Player and just looked at him. His eyes were first on Fukua and then drifted back over to the dark man. He was honestly lost and had no idea what to even think. Everything that happened to him just seemed like a mere afterthought at this point.

"…Wait, what are you talking abo-"

Suddenly he rises up from the floor in a cold sweat. It was here that he awakens to Samson placing his hand in a bowel of water while in his bipedal form, Filia remained sleep on his back. The two stood there in silence just looking at each other in awkward silence.

"…"

"…Go back to sleep, kid."

THE END!

…

Fukua and the man were seen looking at the chair the Player was in before he popped out of existence in the dream world. The man sighs and sits back in his chair. "Well, so much for this 'what if' story. I really need to get some friends…"

"So. I'm just a clone? Mere shadow?" Fukua was staring down to her palms as she asked the question.

"That's right. Just the physical clone of someone in the real world. But hey, at least you had a life of your own in this world. You're nothing like your real world counterpart. You may look the same but your personalities are completely different."

"Even Shamone?"

"Yep. The clone of a girl with a parasite."

"I see. What's this girl's name?" She asked now looking up at him.

"Filia, or something like that. Some girl of minor importance I'm sure." He grabbed his plate and made his way for the kitchen. "After you're done eating you can just leave the house if you want now that you know the truth. I'm not really your father and you're not a real girl so it's whatever at this point. But it was fun while it lasted."

Fukua remained quiet.

"You seem awful fond of this 'Filia' girl. You even rescued her from the sweet release of death. Is she special to you?"

The sudden flash of the other night replayed in Fukua's head as her hand twitched upon her lap.

"She's my friend right now"

More images of the Player and herself flashed before her eyes as her hands twitched with each fragment of memory.

"Might develop her into my love interest or something."

Her mouth began to change from its near permeant emotionless state to what appeared to have been a
"I will hunt her down. If anything were to ever arise I will hunt her down and murder her. I will hang her decapitated head over my fireplace as a trophy."

Her newly formed smile transitioned into a small grin as her teeth began to make themselves apparent.

"You understand?"

With the final words from her memories being spoken to herself Fukua finds herself looking into a mirror in an unknown location made up of pure light. The reflection before her displayed the image of Filia, her original self in the real world. Coming face to face with herself the glass cracks and shatters on its own, completely falling apart and hitting the black limbo that was now her psyche.

"Yes." She spoke to herself, seemingly back at home and in the chair with her breakfast plate before her. "It's all clear to me now...and my path is now set. 'Player', yes...mine. My life...my identity. My mission." She stood up from the table with her back at view, "I'm Filia. Fukua...is Filia...I am, I will be...Filia."

She turned her head revealing a sadistic, dark and menacing look on her face. She now set herself a new life goal. To become the one true Filia and erase her identity as a clone. The soft sounds of a faint chuckle echoes as darkness suddenly falls.

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This chapter is a bit shorter than the others but it's only because it's Fukua and choosing what to actually do with her. There was dark comedy in this chapter but I don't really think it's out of place considering how dark the actual story of Skullgirls is and Fukua is just as dark especially considering what she did in her story in Skullgirls. Creepy stuff.
After an eventful night the Player and Filia managed to get themselves a good night's sleep at the Poorman's Apartment.

The next morning Filia and Samson were the first to awaken with the former sitting by the Player's side, carefully observing him as he tossed and turned in his sleep — under the impression he was having some kind of nightmare.

"Nnnnnnnnnnnnnnnn-….." The Player was lightly grunting for an excessively long time while Filia was looking over him.

"What the hell is wrong with him?" Samson asked.

"He must be having a really bad dream. Should we wake him?" Filia was beginning to look a little worried, now wondering if there was actually something wrong with him.

"I'll do it." Samson took over for Filia and assumed his bipedal form where he then slaps the Player across the face. "Wake up!"

"S-Samson! Did you hit him?!"

Filia was facing the opposite direction so she couldn't tell what was going on but judging from the sound it was clear that Samson had hit him.

"No. Don't be silly, Filia." He proceeded to slap and backslap the Player repeatedly. "Wakey! Wakey!"

Eventually the slaps started to work as the Player began to awaken. "Uuuuuggghhh.…" He began to groan.

"Is he okay?" Filia asked in concern.

"Yeah. He's waking up. Oh well, it was fun while it lasted." Samson gave a small sigh of disappointment.

The Player opened his eyes to Samson's face. "O-Ow... Why does my face hurt?" He placed a hand on his sore cheek and began to rub it.

"I dunno." Samson's grin and casual shrug suggested otherwise.

Before the Player could question Samson he reverted back to his regular form on Filia's head. After regaining complete control over herself Filia faced the Player.

"You were doing a lot of moving around in your sleep. Like you were having a nightmare or something, you were even sweating. Are you feeling okay now?" She placed her hand upon his forehead to see if he had a fever.

"Stop babying him, Filia. He probably dumped us here last night, went out to party and is dealing with a hangover." Samson suggested.

"You really think I'd do something like that? Gee, thanks, Samson."

"Don't mind him. I'm just glad we're all safe. Last night was pretty rough and...Carol."
"Right, your friend." The Player snapped his finger now that he remembered most of last night. "I forgot that we lost her. I'm sorry."

Filia shook her head at his apology and smiled sheepishly. "Don't apologize! Look on the bright side, we're all doing well and we might even find her again...someday. You saved Samson and me, right?"

"Mhm, and I booked us this apartment for a while. You know...I feel bad for nearly leaving you guys back at the church."

"Yeah. That was a pretty bitchy move." Samson added insult to injury only to earn himself a bonk on the head from Filia, though she ultimately ended up just hitting herself but it was nothing. "You saved our lives and that's what matters most. Thank you for saving us, Samson's grateful too."

The aforementioned brute huffed at Filia's statement to suggest the complete opposite.

"Don't be that way, Samson. The least you can do is give him a thank you." Filia turned her head so that the two boys were face to face.

"..."

"...

Samson remained quiet but soon the Player greeted him with puppy dog eyes and a fairly innocent glance, this made Samson shiver and turn his glare to the side, unfortunately for him that look from the Player was now stuck in his head, and he just couldn't be a bad sport to such a face, even if it was stupid.

"Ugh... Thanks for not being a total pansy."

The Player nearly choked and shook his head, pretty much expecting Samson to reply the way he did. He met Samson's response with a smile.

"That's as good as its going to get, isn't it? You're welcome."

"Hmp..."

"Yay! Making up is fun!" Filia cheerfully threw her hands into the air as she saw the two somewhat get along but she quickly flinched as her body was still in a lot of pain from last night. "Ow, ow, ow...guess my body hasn't fully recovered yet."

The moment she flinched the Player held out his hands to her in case she was on the verge of collapsing. "Yeah, don't try to move too much." He says in concern.

Filia giggled lightly, a bit embarrassed at her own fault. "Guess I need to be more careful when choosing my battles."

"Don't worry, kid. We'll get stronger and when we do we'll show them what for. Once we get that out of the way we'll get the Skull Heart and you can get your wish."

"Right." She nods in agreement.

The Player was bit quieter than usual all of a sudden but neither Filia nor Samson took notice. He got up from the floor and looked down to Filia.
"...Hey, I'm gonna go out for a walk, ok?"

"Hm? A walk?"

"Yeah. I just wanna go out and get some air."

"Let me come with you." She tried to stand up but she flinched again, falling onto one knee as the bruises on her legs caught her sudden movement. "A-Aah...my legs."

"No, no, you stay here. You're injured and I want you to rest."

He extended his hand out to her and she took it, the Player helped her off the floor and gave her a gentle pat on the shoulder.

"I'll be back soon, ok?"

Filia gazed at the Player, obviously worried that something may happen to him if she wasn't there, however she didn't want to seem pessimistic so she opted to lighten up to give him some space. "Just...be careful." Was all she could say with a worrisome look.

"I will." He said with an assuring smile that seemed to comfort her.

With their final exchange in words he made his way for the door and left the room. Filia sat on the bed, looking down to the floor, still feeling a bit uncertain about letting him be alone.

Later that morning the Player found himself unable to enjoy his time of peace as his mind was busy with multiple thoughts, however, unlike all the other times before, there was no panic, just himself and a crowd of people going about their daily routine.

"Filia is after the Skull Heart too. Goddamn it, this just makes my mission more difficult. I want my wish! But at the same time I don't want to be a selfish dick about it...she lost her memories so I should just let her have it, right? ...Actually, no! I came here for one thing and one thing only, so why should I change my mind now? I'll get my wish and get the hell out of this place! It's so simple!"

The Player hadn't realized he was talking to himself aloud in public. As he walked down the street people were keeping safe distances from him as if he was crazy.

"But...she is my friend and I care about her...even Samson is growing on me." He said with more confidence than he did in the previous claim regarding himself.

Suddenly a suspicious black car pulls up to the sidewalk and drives alongside him, the passenger seat window rolled down and a mildly overweight man dressed in a sharp looking suit revealed himself to the Player.

"Hey. Hey, you!"

The Player turned and saw the man who was trying to get his attention.

"How you doin'? Aren't you the new kid on the block? The talk of the town. The one they call 'Player'?"

"Um... Yes?"

"Great. I have a little business proposition for you. Get in the car."
The man was obviously bad news and the Player knew this but the look in his eyes was a bit intimidating. "You kidding me? I don't know who you are and mom always said not to talk to strangers."

"That's all good, son. You'll get to know me. Just get in the car. Heh, don't worry about mommy. We got candy and puppies in here too." He mockingly stated before beginning to laugh much to the Player's discomfort.

"...I need an adult."

The goon pulled out a revolver and aimed it at the now frightened younger male. "I am an adult." He replied with a sinister smile.

The Player was taken to Cirque des Cartes, a well-known circus in the Canopy Kingdom. While seeming harmless to the general public there was actually a darker secret behind the circus's origin and those who own it.

Right now the circus was seeing a full house and the final performance was getting underway, meanwhile the goon entered backstage where all the other performers were now that their stunts were over. As he entered they all greeted him warmly, addressing the man as 'boss'. The Player, against his will, was right behind him.

"Glad to have you along. I knew you were a sensible boy."

"You pointed a gun at me man, it was either this or get shot…"

"As I said, you're sensible. You'd be surprised how many are willing to take a bullet." The sinister man chuckled.

The Player remained silent, not wanting to speak or even humor the gangster with a response.

"Now I've got a little job I want you to do for me. I'll explain in detail but I'm waiting for your partner to arrive. She needs to get this too."

"Should've saw this coming…" The Player muttered to himself.

"Ah, there she is. Right on time."

The man pats the Player's back to get his attention, he then pointed to one of the individuals within the small group of performers: A young girl who's attire consisted of a sleeved mini dress with orange and black colors. She was beautiful and had simple black eyes, slightly tan skin, and mint green hair. On her head was a peculiar orange hat that appeared to have muscular arms.

"...Cerebella."The gangster stated, revealing her name, once again sporting a sinister smile. The Player had his head turned away in a rebellious sense so he didn't get a chance to see who his captor was talking about.

The girl eagerly made her way over to the duo with stars in her eyes now that she was looking up to the older male. "Did you see me, Vitale?" She asked enthusiastically. "When Feng told me you were coming, I practiced all weekend and added the elephants! And they didn't poop on her this time!"

Feng, Cerebella's friend and roommate, was nearby and heard her. "...Did you really need to bring that up, Cerebella?"
Cerebella giggled at Feng as a means of playfully teasing her.

"Yes, yes...it was fine." The man, Vitale, spoke to her as if showing no interest. "That hat of yours can put on quite a show. Now, to business — can I speak to you in private? I have a job that requires your...special talents."

Cerebella's look of excitement was reduced to a more disappointed expression after hearing him. "Oh...sure. Is that why you came?" Cerebella then noticed the Player at Vitale's side and couldn't help but get suspicious. "Hey, who's this guy?"

Vitale placed his hand on the Player's back and moved him forward, closer to Cerebella, for an introduction.

"This is going to be your partner. He goes by the code name 'Player'."

The Player's attention was now on Cerebella and his eyes were all over her endowed figure now that he saw her up close. "Hell-ooooooo, gorgeous. It's nice to meet such a-

"Save it." Cerebella stopped him dead in his flirtatious tracks, clearly uninterested in what he had to say. "Vitale, I don't need a partner. I can do these things on my own."

"Trust me, Cerebella, he will be of much use to us."

Cerebella smacked her teeth but was sure not to give any back talk to Vitale and nods in understanding. "Yes sir." There was a bit of irritation in her voice.

"Good." He said with a smile. "Now I need you to...deal with someone for me, Cerebella."

"What do you mean? Do you want me to catch them?"

"Think of it as...bringing them to justice, my dear - a crime against the family cannot go unpunished. The perpetrator is Nadia Fortune, the infamous feral cat burglar."

The Player couldn't help but chuckle getting the image of cat stealing something from a man as well connected as Vitale. He envisioned a cat running away with a greasy bag of food with Vitale giving chase in a heavy sweat.

"You want her to chase a cat? And here I was thinking you'd want her to put someone down or something. Hehe..."

"Shut up!" Cerebella yelled at him. "Don't you dare question Vitale, you're nothing but low muscle."

The Player had jumped back a bit at her sudden sharp outburst. "W-Whoa! At ease! I don't want to be here anymore than you want me to be!"

"Guys, focus." Vitale spoke down to the two to get them back on topic. "She has stolen something from us, a jewel called the 'Life Gem'. Its value cannot be understated."

"A thief?" Cerebella pondered to herself for a moment before sporting a mean glare. "No one messes with the Medicis!"

"Pfft, girl scout." The Player teased under his breath.

"We thought she had been...taken care of, yet somehow she remains a thorn in our side. You are to pursue her and reclaim the Life Gem from her at ANY cost...Am I understood?"
"So what if she doesn't cooperate?" The Player asked.

"ANY means necessary." Vitale repeated himself, causing an unwelcomed feeling to fall upon the Player's shoulder.

Cerebella bumped her chest with a confident grin. "Any cost - got it! Consider it done, Vitale!"

The gangster smiled at her obedience. "There's a good girl. And you, Player?"

"Y-Yeah...I got it."

Vitale nods at him with a smile. "Good. Some of Dahlia's men claim to have seen her in that horrid fish-town, Little Innsmouth. I recommend you two start your search there. Now don't fail me." He turned his back to them and exited the room.

"Yes! I've got this!" Cerebella called out to him while waving.

The Player wasn't interested in her attitude, he had his arms crossed while looking at her. "You're just about a 'yes master' kind of girl, aren't you?"

"Ok, listen, I don't know who you are or why Vitale wanted you to come with me but let me get something straight: I don't trust you nor do I really care about your motives. You're only tagging along because Vitale said so, got it?"

"Look, girl, at first I thought you were cute but your attitude is really unattractive. I honestly wasn't intending to be here, ok? Your boss found out who I was and made me come along with him."

She crossed her arms with a skeptical look. "And just who ARE you?"

"I don't know! I've been told I'm this entity with great power that I can lend to certain people or some kind of protagonist cliché BS like that. I was only here for-"

Cerebella held her hand up dismissively which caused him to stop. "Yeah, yeah. Can we just get this started? I have a job to do." She placed a hand on her hip and made her way toward the exit.

The Player watched as she walked away from him, he remained quiet to see if she was really just going to leave after cutting him off as she did — and she was. "Whoa, whoa! You're just gonna cut me off and-"

"I'm going on ahead with or without your help." She opened the door which closed soon after her.

The Player slightly exposed his teeth in a annoyed manner, he wanted to say something but at this point all he wanted was to get out of whatever he had gotten himself into. He made his way for the exit, following after Cerebella.

The two took to the streets and the search for Nadia Fortune began — the Player was still new to the Canopy Kingdom and Cerebella wasn't too familiar with the residential and business district side of the Canopy Kingdom so the duo weren't having the best time finding directions. The Player was following Cerebella's lead so wherever she went he was right behind her.

"Hm…maybe if I go this way I'll be able to find…no, no, that way leads to the park area." Cerebella took a moment to stop, looking around to better weigh her options but as she stopped the Player, who wasn't paying attention, accidentally walked into her. "Uh! Hey, watch it."

"Oh, my bad. What'd you stop for?"
"I'm trying to figure out where exactly this Little Innsmouth place is. Geez, where's a map when you need one?"

"Wait. So…you have no idea where we're going?"

"Not yet."

The Player placed his hands in his jeans pockets and smirked at Cerebella who continued looking around, not letting the situation get to her.

"And this gangster sent you to handle a job for him? Not a very organized organization."

Cerebella turned to the Player and gave him a cold stare, he didn't know it but Cerebella took great offense to those who would badmouth the 'family' she was a part of.

She grabbed a hold of the Player by the collar of his shirt and backed him against a nearby building. "Talk trash about the Medici's again and you'll be dealing with me." The Player's eyes widened as he looked down to Cerebella, he didn't speak and remained quiet while staring down to her. "You got that?" Cerebella asked while scowling at him.

The Player's eyes fluttered, a smile of satisfaction forming on his face the more he looked down. "…I can see down your shirt and this view and simply amazing. Goddamn!"

Cerebella's cheeks were now alight with a shade of red out of embarrassment and she quickly released him, taking a step back while the hand of her hat covered her chest area as she retaliated.

"What?! Why would you just randomly spout something like that?"

"…"

Cerebella noticed the Player's puzzled gaze, with her chest covered there couldn't have been much for him to stare at now. "What? What is it now?" She asked with a defensive brow raised.

He pointed to the large hat on her head showing his attention was elsewhere. "Um. That hat, it's covering you and its making facial expressions as well. What uh…what's that about?"

"Hm? Oh, you mean Vice Versa? Yeah. It's able to move about on its own sometimes. Why? Is that really surprising?"

"Um, yes! It's kinda cool." He became more amazed with the hat than Cerebella's measurements, it even had a pretty cool name.

The Player approached Cerebella and gave Vice Versa's muscular arm a gentle poke to see what it felt like and Vice Versa flexed its mighty bicep for the Player. Cerebella was a bit surprised at this sudden turn around and slightly turned her head away, preventing the Player from touching any farther, she readjusted her head once he realized she didn't want him touching her hat.

"You've never heard of a Living Weapon? What rock did you crawl out of?"

"I'm just not from around here. I've only been in the Canopy Kingdom for a day. Most of everything I see is brand new to me. 'Living Weapon', you said, that sounds cool. Are there more?"

"Well…yeah, but that's not important. If you've only been here for a day how can Vitale just bring you on board like its nothing? I don't understand."

"If you let me explain earlier you would know my side of the story. I don't know how or why he
knows me but that bastar- I mean…Vitale forced me to come along. He said if I didn't co-operate I'd be sleeping with the fish."

Cerebella eyed the Player from head-to-toe and wasn't impressed with what she was seeing. "Hmm. You don't look very tough. Not very muscular and I doubt you've ever gotten your hands dirty."

This only fueled Cerebella's confusion considering her previous work of assisting in wars against rival gangs, fighting against the law and whatever it was Vitale needed her to do.

"Um, thank...you? But let's not think too hard on it. This is something we're just going to have to deal with, right?"

"…Yeah."

The Player noticed Cerebella was a bit discouraged and he couldn't figure out why because he didn't know much about her. She did give off the 'lone wolf' vibe for him though so perhaps that was it — he figured she wasn't used to having company around when handling her business, but, in an act of trying to make peace, he gave her a supporting pat on the back.

"Come on. Don't worry about it. Let's just get this gem thing back and then we can go about our regular lives again."

Cerebella felt his hand and she faced him, finding a friendly smile from her partner. She could tell he wasn't a bad person and based on the story he was just at the wrong place at the wrong time, maybe Vitale had gotten him confused with somebody else, but whatever the case may be Cerebella wasn't too keen on her boss trusting anyone else to handle his personal jobs. Cerebella nods at the Player's response, though unable to return the smile.

"Right. Thanks. But we should get moving, I don't like wasting time. Let's find the thief."

"We don't even know where to look." The Player scanned the area, hoping to find some form of information board containing a map of the city but all he found was pedestrians going about their lives. He turned to one of the pedestrians passing him by and held out his hand, "Oh, uh, excuse me!" he called out to them.

The pedestrian noticed the Player was talking to him and he stopped, removing the headphones from his ears. "You talkin' to me?" He asked with his headphones now around his neck.

"Yeah. Do you know where Little Innsmouth is?"

"Little Innsmouth? Uuum, yeah." He pointed in the direction toward the downtown area of New Meridian. "What you want to do is go down this block; once you hit 15th street make a left. You should see 'MadMan's Café' around there, make another left and you'll be on the right track. It's a business district, you can't miss it."

"Ok, just down this block and a left? All right. That should do. Thanks, man."

The Player waves but is soon pulled away by Cerebella. "Would you come on?" She said in a minor fit.

"A-Aye! Why you pullin' me along like that?" He asked while taking his arm away from her grip.

"Why not ask him if he knows the thief? Oh! Better yet, tell him there's a couple of Medici muscle coming down to Little Innsmouth in case somebody didn't realize it. You could've blown our cover. If anything goes down in that area they might identify us."
"I'm pretty sure they'd identify us because you're dressed like a clown and wearing a big ass hat. I shouldn't have to point out the more 'obvious' reason." He grins, peering down to her chest once again.

Cerebella noticed his gaze and followed his stare down to her ample bust which she covered up before stomping her foot. "Will you cut that out?!" The blush she had on earlier resurfaced.

Seeing her red cheeks made the Player laugh mmischievously but he didn't mean her any harm and was just trying to lighten up around her. With distractions out of the way he took the lead and walks down the street, following the directions provided by the civilian from earlier. Cerebella huffs and followed him albeit pouty in the most adorable way possible for someone like her.

The duo casually made their way through the crowd, the farther they traversed the busier the streets got — the Player was use to this due to his upbringing back home, city life was nothing new for him but Cerebella was a bit overwhelmed by everything around her, despite growing up under the Medici family Cerebella was always kept in from the world, usually only staying in with her circus friends until Vitale needed her to handle a job as Medici muscle, even then most jobs didn't require her going far from glitzier side of Canopy and if it did she was driven to certain locations and handled the rest with force.

The Player was getting familiar with the area, he managed to spot the MadMan's Café just across the street, it was here that he realized he's been here before, that was the same café where he first met Filia.

As he walked by he couldn't help but stare at the café, wondering if Filia was still doing ok back at the apartment. He didn't want to worry his new roommate with being out so late which made him wonder how long this particular job was going to take, or if this was even the last task Vitale would want him to handle, who was to say if he'd want more jobs done? The more he thought about it the more messy things seemed to get so he tried not to think about it too much. The Player gently sighs but walked into a pole not a second later, the sound of the metal clinging from the impact could be heard as he backed away, rubbing his aching forehead.

Cerebella witnessed this and laughed at the Player's lack of awareness. With one eye shut from the pain he looked back at her with an embarrassed smile. She tried concealing her laughter by placing her palm over her mouth but it was clear as day she was laughing at him, even Vice Versa had a snickering expression.

Just then a familiar scent seduced the Player's nostrils the closer they got to their destination, at this point he was following the scent rather than actually remembering the directions given to him.

"Hm..." He began smelling the air similar to that of a dog. "I know this smell. That Yu-Wan restaurant is around here."

"You've been here before?"

"Yeah. I think I have. It's that Chinatown-like area I was in the other day. I never managed to get anything to eat because some crazy stuff went down." He continued to sniff around.

Cerebella looks on as he did this and couldn't help but notice how odd it looked. "Um, what the heck are you doing? Are you part dog or something?"

"No, no, this is good. How can you not smell that?"

"I smell it but I'm not gonna act like I don't have any home training."
"You grew up in a circus, ya freak." The Player playfully teased, not meaning any personal offense by his words.

"What was that?!" Cerebella clenched a provoked fist up at him while also bearing a comical sharp-toothed grin.

"Hush, circus tits. The scent speaks to me…"

Before Cerebella could reply the Player was already well on his way, jogging over to a flight of stairs that apparently lead to the upper level of the seaside district. Just across from him was the Yu-Wan restaurant which sat at the heart of the town.

"Well, my nose was right. There's the restaurant but how the hell do I get over there? The section I'm on doesn't have any walkways leading over there. Whoever was the urban planner needs to get the electric chair." The Player made his way around the wooden pathway to find a way across.

Walking along the same pathway as him was a familiar feline figure, she was stretching her arms above her head before placing them behind her head. Based on her smile she didn't have a care in the world.

"That meal was the cat's pajamas! I'll literally burst if I'm not careful! Hehe."

"Ok, now if I keep going along this way it looks like I'll make it to the other side of the district. If I'm not mistaken there's another pathway just beyond here that'll get me- Huh?"

He noticed the woman walking in his direction and couldn't help but identify her but this was to be expected, every time he's seen her she's been without her head. The two got closer and closer and as they crossed paths she casually strolled by him without notice. As she passed by he stops and looked back to her.

"…Excuse me! Ms.?

The woman's cat ears twitched when he called out to her, she turned and faced him, still maintaining her smile. "Mew? You're talking to me?" She asked with her index finger extended to herself.

"Uh, yeah. I'm new around here and I'm sorta lost. I had a few questions if you don't mind pointing me in the right direction of a few places?"

"Sure! I can help ya out. What do you need to know?"

"Great. Well first…do you know where Little Innsmouth is?"

"Well that's a no brainer considering you're already there. This is Little Innsmouth! Home sweet home."

"Oh really? Heh…guess that makes me look a little stupid."

"Yep!"

She continued to smile with her blunt reply as if nothing was wrong. The Player held a conflicted smirk at her response and the woman laughed playfully at his reaction.

"Actually…nyaow that I think about it you look familiar. Have we met somewhere before?"

The Player was surprised that the woman was just now realizing he was familiar. "Uh, I'd be lying if I said we hadn't. Yeah. We certainly did meet before. I met you when I first got off the blimp ship…"
thingy the other day." He was trying his best to forget all the horrifying sights of decapitation.

"Ah! Nyaow I know! You're the same guy that stopped my body for me. You freaked out and ran off before I had the chance to say thank you."

"Well I'm not used to seeing people without their heads...being alive without it no less. How were you even able to do that?"

"Hmmmm, that's my little secret." She teased with a cute cat-like smile. "What's your name anyway? I get the feeling we'll be seeing a lot of each other in the future."

'Even when I don't want to...great.' He thought to himself while poorly impersonating a casual smile. 
"You can call me the 'Player', it's sort of a street name. And you are?"

"Nya? 'Player'? That's pretty cool. Weird but cool. It's nice to meet you, 'Player'. My name is-"

Before she could fully introduce herself Cerebella approached the two, coming up from behind the cat woman. "There you are. You honestly couldn't wait up for me?" She pointed her question toward the Player who had just noticed her.

"Oh. I actually forgot you were tagging along with me. My bad." He snickered with one hand in his pocket, the other rubbing the back of his neck.

"Tagging along? Ha! You're the one who's tagging along. You should honestly be more careful and not wander off too far." Seeing that she had the Player's attention she was ready to throw in the bait, now giving him a cocky smirk. "We both know you can't fight. You'd be dead in five minutes without me."

"Oh! You're a smart ass, huh?" The Player replied, taking the bait hook, line and sinker.

It was Cerebella's ploy to get him a bit uppity, she was showing her playful and rambunctious side by doing this, Vice Versa was even holding an expression that resembled a cheerful smile. The Player moved over to Cerebella and held a finger up to her smug mug.

"Listen, circus tits, I'm the one with the untapped superpower. I'm the secret weapon of this operation. YOU follow MY lead."

Cerebella challenged him by moving even closer, rivaling his dominance with her own, the two were now clashing foreheads. This battle was all in the mind even if they didn't realize it.

"Untapped power, now that's funny. You're just a meat shield in case I need one." In the midst of their little scramble Cerebella just noticed the feline who was entertained by their exchanges standing behind the Player. Cerebella backed away from the Player and unintentionally caused him to fall onto the wooden walkway. "A-ha! At last. I've found you, Nadia Fortune!"

"Goddamn it, Cerebella!" The Player shouted from the ground, the attention was still focused on Cerebella and Nadia, so they paid him no mind.

"Return the Life Gem, or things are going to get rough!"

The cat woman was exposed, Nadia Fortune, looked on curiously, stroking her chin with her index finger and thumb to ponder on Cerebella's demand and how she could've possibly known about the gem.

"What's this nya-o?" She eyed Cerebella from top to bottom, getting a feel for her identity. "Circus
get-up, attitude to spare, low-cut dress…let me guess, you're one of Vitale's rent-a-hoods?"

"Daaaaaamn! Kitty got no chill." The Player, out of view, spontaneously shouted out to Cerebella after Nadia made her observation, Cerebella narrowed her eyes down to him and raised her foot just above him to give a minor stomp to his backside. "Ow!" He cried out.

After getting the Player to shut up Cerebella's attention was back on Nadia. "Watch your tongue, you mangy thief! You stole from the Medicis and I'm here to get it back. Return the Life Gem!"

Nadia rolled her eyes and crossed her arms. "Quit clowning around."

"Oh. Because she's from the circus. I get it." The Player randomly spoke out once again.

"You didn't actually think it'd be that easy, did you? I'm afraid I can't give you back the gem but I can give you walloping instead!"

Cerebella was all about business when it came to handling the Medicis work, even more so Vitale's. She knew it was about to get ugly but it wasn't anything she wasn't prepared for, most missions begin this way for her. The Player on the other hand watched the two from below, as he was still lying on the wooden platform.

"Why does it seem like getting into street fights is the only way to make progress in this kingdom?" He questioned with his finger held up between the two ladies to indicate he was talking but the girls continued to pay him no mind.

Vice Versa jointed its hands together and raised them above Cerebella, seeing the hat move took Nadia by surprise resulting in the Feral lowering her guard for a moment. Vice Versa brought its large hands down upon Nadia's head and with great force destroys the walkway they were standing on, a large dust cloud arose from the impact, large planks of wood were flying everywhere as the group fell to the districts lower level.

The Player bursts out in a panic while falling but in the midst of their descent Cerebella managed to grab onto him with one hand and in the other she held onto Vice Versa who managed to inflate in the air allowing them to gently float down, acting as a sort of parachute. The duo managed to land safely, the wooden debris made a rough and loud crash prior to their landing so nothing rained on them.

"I'm dead. I'm dead, I'm dead, I'm dead…am I dead?"

Cerebella cracked a brief smile as she readjusted Vice Versa who took a temporary smaller form. "You're not dead, you big baby. Now open your eyes."

Doing as she instructed the Player opened his eyes and saw he was sitting at Cerebella's feet. He placed his hand on his head and gave a big sigh in relief before he got up. "What the hell were you thinking? You could've killed all of us being reckless like that."

"I had it all under control, relax." She teased with an extend of her tongue.

The Player didn't want to feed into Cerebella's taunt, rather he crossed his arms and huffed while turning his head away but this ended up having him notice one of Nadia's legs sticking out from the wooden debris. He took a closer look and realized she wasn't moving.

"…Wait, Cerebella, did you kill her?"

"Kill her? No. Why would you even ask that?"
Cerebella readjusted Vice Versa back to its normal size and placed her weapon back on her head, she then made her way over to the Player and investigated the mess with him, she was beginning to hope the overhead attack wasn't fatal which only lead to her being concerned.

"You sure?" The Player asked for assurance. "She's crushed under all this wood and isn't moving. Plus she fell from that impressive height and I doubt anybody could survive that. You didn't have to do that."

"I didn't do it!" She lashed out at the Player unintentionally. "I'm no killer. I would never kill anybody. I bruise but I don't take lives."

Based on her expression she was clearly more than worried about Nadia's condition but the Player turned away from Cerebella's face in doubt, he wanted to believe her but she was muscle for the mafia and as such it was hard to see the honesty in her words. He had never met any real mobster's before arriving in Canopy Kingdom but it didn't take meeting one to know their enemies had to be dealt with in the most permanent way possible.

Cerebella turned to the buried thief and tossed the wooden piles aside in a hurry. "Help me dig her out." She requested the help of the Player in a bit of a panic.

Just as Cerebella started moving the bigger pieces the debris pile bursts into the air much to the duo's shock, this was taken to eleven once they realized Nadia was standing before them. The Feral stood before them and placed her hand on her shoulder, moving her neck from left to right, giving it a good stretch.

"Man. That thing sure packs a punch. Completely took me by surprise there."

Seeing that Nadia took the attack like it was nothing left Cerebella speechless, and the Player was almost just as surprised as Cerebella but considering he's seen her without her head multiple times it wasn't much of a shocker.

"How're you still alive?" He asked.

"Whatcha mean?" She faced the Player.

"This is like…the third time I witnessed you survive impossible odds: I've seen you without your head, twice, and now you survive a life ending fall before being crushed. What is your deal? Are you on god mode or something? I can't stand god mode characters."

"Um…not sure what you're talking about but yes, I'm able to survive a lot of things. My body is pretty neat. Huh? I can do lots of stuff." Nadia proudly spoke as she held her right arm back, "Liiiiiiike this!" without warning she lunged her arm forward and, much to the Player and Cerebella's surprise, grabbed Cerebella by the sleeve, before she could react the other arm came and grabbed the other sleeve.

Now that Cerebella was within her grasp Nadia propelled her body forward and collided heads with her attacker, the impact forced Cerebella back and she hit the ground, sliding a considerable distance from where Nadia delivered her headbutt. After the hit Nadia lands on her feet with a competitive grin.

"Cerebella!" The Player ran to her side while she held her forehead on the ground. "Jeez, that looked like it hurt. Are you ok?"

"Nngh… I've had worse." A small trail of blood leaked from the injury on her forehead, Cerebella placed her hand on the Player's shoulder and moved him to the side so that she stood in front of him.
"That was an impressive trick, thief."

"Right?! As I said, I can do lots of neat stuff. Consider that payback for bashing me on top of the head earlier."

"You're standing like you didn't even feel anything."

"Oh don't get me wrong, I can very much feel pain it's just that I'm so used to...well, practically everything. I can take it like a champ. It's nothing I'm not used to."

Cerebella closed her left eye as she felt the blood trickling down her eyelid, despite her injury she was ready for more, nothing was going to stop her until the Life Gem was back in her possession. Before Cerebella could make the next move the Player placed his hand on her shoulder.

"What do you want? I'll handle her." She whispered over her shoulder.

"No, no, it's not that. I don't think you should fight her. Not in your condition."

"What? I don't have time for that. I've got to get that gem back, and fast."

Cerebella pulls her shoulder away from his grip and charged for Nadia, Vice Versa appeared to have grown large horns to match Cerebella's dash, this technique was similar to that of a ram charging its enemy.

"Wait!" The Player called out to her, but regardless of what he tried it wouldn't sway Cerebella.

Nadia was once again surprised at Vice Versa capabilities and marveled at the transformation with swollen eyes. She was even impressed with Cerebella's mobility given that Vice Versa was looking rather heavy in that form.

The performer managed to tackle Nadia in the chest while she was distracted, trapping her between Vice Versa's horns. After gaining enough speed Cerebella stopped and threw her head upwards, throwing Nadia off of Vice Versa and into a building which she destroyed after smashing into it.

The house she was sent flying into belonged to the waitress Minette who cried out in horror from the sudden crash while in the middle of watching TV. Nadia's body managed to land in one of the chairs by the couch Minette was sitting in.

"...I really need to stop getting sidetracked." Nadia rubbed the back of her head like it was nothing more than a minor headache.

"N-Nadia?"

"Hm? Oh! Hey, Minette. What's up?"

"....You just...crashed through and..."

She smiled at her timid friend and got up from the chair, dusting herself off. "Yeah, sorry about that. I'm in the middle of a fight with another one of Vitale's goons. I'll pay for all the damages, don't worry." Nadia gave her a thumbs up and ran out through the giant hole in the wall.

Minette didn't know how to respond and just sat in silence with two blank circular eyes.

Nadia was quick on her feet and was approaching Cerebella at an impressive spee, she grabbed onto her tail and pulled it off, interestingly her tail seemed to have hardened with the underside being razor sharp, resembling that of a sword.
Cerebella wipes the injury on her forehead and opened her eye once the blood stopped running down her face. 'She can detach her limbs, huh? No doubt this is work of the Life Gem.' She thought to herself upon observation.

Nadia jumped high into the air and plummets down toward Cerebella, the falling feline lunged her tail forward but Cerebella was already one step ahead, Vice Versa hardened its muscles and held out its arms in a defensive style, completely shielding Cerebella from harm. The tail blade clashed with Vice Versa's muscles and neither gained the upper hand over the other.

The Feral pulled her tail back and kicked herself off of Vice Versa, back flipping a good distance away from them. Cerebella felt the weight lift off of her and had Vice Versa lower its arms to see Nadia landing and reconnecting her tail The atmosphere intensified as they remained still, silently staring one another down.

From the sky a lone bird feather descends to the ground, making its way to the space between the two girls, their eyes remained focus on the other — both sides determined to keep going until they were victorious.

The feather managed to float down to eye level between them and then it finally touched the ground.

Once the feather was able to land the two charged for each other, the fierceness in their eyes was similar to that of vicious predator's locked in a death match. The two cocked their arms back and threw a hefty punch forward this only resulted in a punch exchange to the face — the impact made saliva spray from their mouths as they bounced onto ground, laying out on their backsides. It was a double KO.

The Player noticed the two were both down and approached them. "...All right, ladies. Break it up." The fight was already over so playing peace maker was rather pointless. Cerebella and Nadia regained their senses and got up from the ground.

"You and that hat make a good team. I'll give him one thing, Vitale sure knows how to pick his women."

Nadia stood while rubbing her sore cheek. She realized Cerebella wasn't truly as bad and morally disgusting as Medici's, it was evident when Cerebella was worried about her condition when she was trapped under the wooden platform debris from earlier, she was conscious and could hear everything both she and the Player were saying while buried.

Nadia exhaled and gave a light smile to Cerebella. "Look, you seem nice… naïve but nice. I'll give it to you straight: I wasn't lying when I said I can't return the Life Gem."

Cerebella was less than amused by Nadia's statement and huffed. "...Do you seriously expect me to take the word of a thief?"

"Hold on, Cerebella, let's hear her out." The Player stepped in with his hand placed on her shoulder. "What do you mean you can't give it back? You don't have it on you?"

"Why do you think my body is this way? It's because I swallowed that weird gem the Fishbone Gang stole from Lorenzo. That's when that Dahlia broad and her goons caught us."

"Dahlia?" The Player mumbled to himself.

"Next thing I know, I wake up on the ocean floor, chopped up in a pile with the rest of my gang… only I'm still alive."
The Player noticed the markings on Nadia's arms, legs and neck. Seeing this he realized how the Medici's handled her, the mental image of seeing her cut into pieces made him cringe.

The Medici's were a horrid group of individuals but as are the rules in organized crime. He noticed Nadia's expression had saddened and seeing this made him feel sorry for her despite not knowing her. He couldn't believe that Cerebella, clearly the opposite of the ruthless family, was associated and deeply loyal to them.

"Anyway, I'm off to steal me a Skull Heart. Say 'Hi' to your boss for me…and tell him that I'll be paying him a visit real soon. Ciao!" Nadia smiled and waved cheerfully at the two. Using her speed and agility she easily made her way to the rooftop's, fleeing the scene before Cerebella could act.

"Wait!" She called out but it was already too late. "Damn. She got away. So she doesn't have the gem…"

"She said she swallowed it remember? If it's honestly called 'Life Gem' I can pretty much bet her surviving everything she's been through is because of that thing. She definitely still has it and probably always will… Unless-"

"Unless?" Cerebella questioned.

The Player faced her. "Unless she ends up going to the bathroom and it ends up coming out. Let's just hope she doesn't eat anything bad."

Cerebella made a face of disgust and gave a gentle punch to the Player's shoulder. "Stop being nasty. Whatever the case may be we still need to get that gem, at any means necessary."

"Right, right, of course but do you mind if we go check on somebody first?"

"Who?"

"A friend of mine. Before your boss snatched me up I told her I was going out for a walk. I want to let her know that I'll be coming back a little later than expected." The Player reached into his pocket and took out his wallet, opening it to see he had no money though he wasn't surprised by this. "And I'm broke. I have no idea how I'm supposed to keep us afloat without a job."

"What do you mean? This is a job, but Vitale won't pay until we finish."

The Player shifted an enlightened gaze toward Cerebella. "He's actually gonna pay me if we get this done?"

"Yes, that's how it usually goes. I don't see why he wouldn't pay you."

The Player didn't respond, rather he stood in awe while thinking of the massive payload he could've gotten from carrying out the mission. He didn't know much about organized crime on a personal level, he only knew what he saw from fictional movies which always depicted the mafia as a wealthy business. In the realm of fantasy he envisioned himself laying back on a super king sized bed with expensive silk sheets while being surrounded by a handful of beautiful women. To make it even more overblown $100 bills were raining onto him from the sky as he laughed manically in his fortune.

Back in reality his non changing expression began to creep Cerebella out. "Player? Player!"

"….Huh? Wha-?"
"I said you can go but make it quick. We've still got a job to do. I'll stay around here and ask around about Nadia."

Seeing that she was still faithfully focused on the mission made the Player sigh, he grabbed Cerebella by the hand and pulled her along with him. "You're coming too." He states.

"Hands off! I'm not going. I have to find her!"

"There's no rush. We weren't given a time limit, and besides you're still injured so we're going to be taking it easy for a little while. Not to mention we have to fix that nasty wound on your forehead."

Cerebella nearly forgot about the injury on her forehead but this didn't stop her from protesting against the Player as he dragged her along.

"Don't worry about me. I'm okay!"

"I don't wanna hear it." He replied.

"I'm fine!"

"Shut up."

The two continued their back and forth for most of the walk back to the city.

At the apartment Filia was waiting patiently in the front room twiddling her thumbs on the couch as a distraction while Samson was occupied reading 'PlayBunny'. Filia looked toward the window and noticed the sun was going down, it had been a while since the Player left and it was beginning to cloud her mind with worry.

"Do you think he's okay?" She asked Samson.

"Who?"

"The Player. He's been gone for a long time."

"Oh. I completely forgot about him. I don't know and I don't really ca- DAMN! Look at the rack on this chick!"

"Samson, I'm serious…"

"I'm serious too." Samson reached his arms overhead and placed the magazine in front of Filia. "Look at how huge they are. They gotta be implants, right?"

Filia blushed brightly once she saw the woman in the magazine and turned her head with her eyes closed. "AAH! I don't want to see that!" She pushed the magazine away from her face.

Samson laughed and retracted his arms back to normal so that he could continue enjoying the adult content.

The sound of the front door unlocking got Filia's attention, but Samson was too engaged with his magazine to really pay anything else much mind. She got up from the couch and made her way for the door but was met halfway by the Player and Cerebella, the latter carried Vice Versa in its smaller form.

"You're back!" Even if she didn't intend to Filoa made it clear that she was really joyed to see that
her friend had returned. "You were gone longer than I thought."

The Player gave a faint smile, rubbing the back of his head, unsure of how to explain everything that happened. "Uuuh, yeah. It's been a pretty active day so far. Turns out I still have a lot to do."

Cerebella noticed something off about Filia, obviously it was her hair, Samson was still tending to his reading. "Um...is your hair holding up that book?" She asked while pointing toward Filia.

Filia gave Cerebella an innocent yet confused smile but just then she remembered Samson wasn't hidden away, the sudden realization hit her and she placed her hands on top of her head in a panic, desperately trying to hide her parasite.

"O-Oh! That's nothing! Just a new style I'm trying out. Hehe...heh..." She grins nervously at Cerebella.

"Hey! I can't see! What gives, Filia?!" Samson shouted as her hands blocked his eyes.

"That's the TV!" She quickly made up another excuse on the fly.

The Player faced Cerebella as if he was completely unaware of Filia intentions. "She's got a bad weave demon named Samson. He's pretty annoying."

Samson heard the Player and dropped the magazine, now grabbing Filia's wrists to pull her hands away from his eyes. Filia could only stand there in dismay, staring helplessly at Cerebella.

"You're the annoying one!" Samson retorted to the Player.

"No way! Is that a parasite?!" Cerebella was clearly in shock over Samson's appearance.

"Who's asking?" Samson then directed his question toward Cerebella which made him realize she was actually looking at him. "...Oh. I'm not hidden am I?"

Filia sighed. "No."

Samson released Filia's wrists and rubbed the side of his head. "Oops." He was rather casual about it.

"What's the big deal?" The Player questioned.

"You don't know?" Cerebella asked. "Hosts to a parasite in the Canopy Kingdom are ostracized. Some are even put to death. Parasitic hosting is taboo here."

The Player gave a long "Aaaaaah..." once Cerebella explained the situation. "So that's why you hide Samson away. I was wondering when the exposition would come."

Filia answers by nodding at the Player. "We were nearly discovered at the café. That's why I was telling Samson to keep calm and not blow our cover. Who knows what'll happen if people find out about us."

The Player crossed his arms, intrigued by what he was hearing. "And here I was thinking it was to conceal head lice."

"Lice? I'll kick your ass, kid!"

"Oh. I'm shaking, I'm shaking." The Player sarcastically replied.

"Gah! You're lucky I don't have time for you right now. We've got more important matters to deal
Filia eyes were quickly directed upward. "What?" Her tone was evident enough that she already didn't like the idea.

"She knows about us. We can't risk her ratting us out to the feds."

"But Samson-"

Before Filia could finish her sentence Cerebella stepped in. "I'm no rat, and I don't discriminate. It seems we're both on the opposite side of the law."

Her words piqued Samson's curiosity. "What do you mean?" He asked in interest.

"I know your secret so I'll let you in on mine: I work for the Medici family. We run this town and we do what we gotta do to survive."

"The Medicis…?" Samson whispered to himself.

Filia heard Samson and once again directed her attention up to him. "Some people you know?"

"Uh…n-no. Never heard of em, Filia."

The Player bit his bottom lip with a grin slowly forming on his smug face as he gave a quiet stare to Samson.

Samson noticed the Player and knew full well what his expression was implying. The Parasite didn't bother to humor him with a response and simply looked in the other direction.

"Well…it looks like we'll trust you. For now. If this idiot brought you here then I guess we don't have to worry about much."

Rather than engaging in a war of words he just stood there, nodding at Samson without saying anything and smiling, his expression was the only comeback needed. He made his way upstairs to fetch a first-aid kit.

Cerebella could see that Filia meant no harm and smiled as Samson reconsidered the possibility of a violent altercation.

"Just make sure you keep this between us, got it?"

"Same goes for you two."

"Phew… Thankfully a fight didn't break out." Filia smiled cheerfully at Cerebella and placed her hand on her chest. "My name is Filia by the way. It's nice to meet you. Are you friends with the Player?"

"I'm Cerebella, and as for the 'Player', or whatever his actual name is, we're associates with a common goal."

The Player came back downstairs just in time to hear Cerebella's response with first-aid in hand. "Associates? You know damn well we're friends by now." He playfully replied.

He put the box on the kitchen counter and took out a few supplies: medical ointment, a cotton pad, rubbing alcohol and a long string of cotton bandage.
"Get over here, Cerebella. Let's tend to that wound."

Cerebella placed her hand on her forehead and flinched from the soreness, she lowered her hand and saw a few traces of blood on her fingertips — the injury was still new so keeping it exposed without being treated would've been bad for her. She walked into the kitchen and stood beside the Player, waiting for him to treat her.

"Wound?" Filia asked, as she hadn't noticed her forehead before thanks to her bangs. Getting a closer look she saw the injury. Samson stretched his arm down to the floor and grabbed his magazine as Filia made her way to the kitchen as well. "Ooh. That looks painful. Did you fall?"

"I was in a fight with this thief and she got a good hit in."

The Player began to treat Cerebella, wiping her forehead with a wet paper towel. He threw away the used sheet and grabbed the small bottle of alcohol which he used on one of the cotton pads, he placed the pad gently on her forehead and slowly wiped away at it.

The alcohol stung resulting in Cerebella gritting her teeth a bit the moment the pad touched her skin but she quickly adjusted and kept a straight face afterward.

"A thief? Were you with her, Player?" Filia asked.

"Yeah. After the fight was over we came here. I actually wanted to come back to let you know that I was going to be leaving out again."

After rubbing in the alcohol on her head the Player threw away the pad then reached for the ointment, he dipped his index and middle fingers into the cream and scooped enough to apply over the dry alcohol. The Player took the cotton bandage and wrapped it around Cerebella's forehead as the finishing touch.

"Leaving out again? Where are you going?"

"To find that thief Cerebella fought. She's got something of value and we have to get it back. It's kinda mandatory."

"Wait, I don't understand... You were only going out for a walk this morning but now you have to find a thief for something they stole?"

"It's kind of a long story. The short version is: her boss found me during my walk, forced me into his car at gunpoint, told me I was going to help her retrieve this stolen item, we tracked the thief to Little Innsmouth, Cerebella fought her, they beat each other to a draw and then the thief ran. As I mentioned before I just wanted to come back and let you know that I might be gone for a little while longer. After that we can get back to our search, 'k?"

"...All of this happened in that short amount of time? I knew I should've went with you. Let me help."

"No." Cerebella quickly rejected the idea in a stern voice. "We don't need anybody on the outside getting involved. This is my mission and we stick to the original plan. Nothing personal, I just can't afford to fail."

Filia lowered her head in disappointment but the Player placed his hand on her shoulder and gave her a little shake in a friendly attempt to get her attention.

"Don't worry. We'll be fine, and guess what? Cerebella was nice enough to lend us some money for
"...Really? You didn't have to do that for us." Filia once again found her smile thanks to the news.

Cerebella shook her head in response. "It's no big deal. He told me about your situation on the way over here and wanted to help. I know it must be rough with the amnesia." She then crossed her arms under her bust, unintentionally giving the Player an eyeful but her attention was directed toward Filia to even notice how strong his stares were.

"It's not so bad. Ever since I met Samson he's been a big help, and the Player has offered a helping hand as well so there's still a lot of positivity in all of this. I feel as long as I have these two by my side I can do anything!"

Cerebella blinked twice at Filia before a warm smile formed on her face, she soon found herself giggling lightly at the amnesiac's optimism.

Filia noticed Cerebella's reaction and blushed. "I guess that sounds a little cheesy, huh?" She smiled shyly.

"I'm not laughing at you. I just wasn't expecting you to be so positive. I like that."

"Heheh. It's pretty easy with friends like these. There aren't many people in the world who are willing to be supportive to those in need. I'm lucky. Even if I never regain my old memories...I'll have the new ones."

"...Hm." Cerebella placed one hand on her hip and notched her mouth to the side, now showing a more uncertain expression. "You really think it'll be that simple?"

"What do you mean?"

"You said even if you never regained your old memories you'd have the new ones. You can't simply replace them as if its nothing, you know? You may not remember but what about the people who do? Those looking for you, the ones who are worried sick. Your old friends? Family and so on."

Cerebella raised a good point and Filia knew this since she didn't have anything to counter her words. It hadn't even crossed her mind that the people associated with her original memories were most likely worried about her wellbeing, based on what she said earlier Filia began to wonder if her choice of words made her come off as sounding selfish.

"She hasn't truly forgotten." The Player, now out of his trance, finally spoke up, it seemed as though his mind was still with them despite drifting off to wonderland.

Apparently he was focused enough to get the gist of the girls conversation. Filia and Cerebella turned to him, Samson was still flipping through the pages of his magazine without a care.

"Filia's memories are...um, how can I put it? ...They're kinda 'sleep'. I know that doesn't make much sense but that's the best way I know how to put it. They're just waiting to be awakened and her journey, this search, is just what she needs to get them back."

"What makes you so sure?" Cerebella asked doubtfully.

"When we met her friend Filia instantly remembered who she was just by meeting her." He faced Filia to make sure he had the story straight. "Remember that?"

Filia nods at him. "Yeah...that did happen. At first I couldn't remember anyone, I only knew my
name and that's about it. When I ran into that girl she told me her name and after that my memories of her came back. I just suddenly remembered she was a really good friend of mine. I can't explain it clearly with words but I remembered."

The Player then turned to Cerebella once Filia explained. "See? That's what I mean. We'll get her memories back, I know we will. She'll remember everything and then keep all the memories she has now. At least…that's what I figure."

Samson huffed and was pretending to gag from the Player's speech. "You're such a lame ass, kid!"

It was about that time for another back and forth between Samson and the Player. The Player was quick to retaliate with a comeback and thus their bickering commenced.

Cerebella hadn't met a group of people quite like them before, in fact she hasn't met anyone outside the circus crew she performed with, she stood in silence and watched their interaction, her facial expression was rather plain and unchanging as she observed them but she noticed that Filia was smiling as the boys argued. Even though her situation was grim the smile was an obvious sign that she was happy and full of hope, Cerebella could see this was the result of her bond with the Player and Samson, her 'guardians'.

The young circus performer reflected on her own past, despite her best attempts to please Vitale he hasn't shown much interest in Cerebella. He adopted her and exposed her to the highlife she grew accustomed to but nothing more, his relationship with her was more out of business than a caring father-daughter one.

Deep down Cerebella was already well aware of this, but her desperate attempt to have him see her as more than just muscle caused her to repress any doubtful thoughts, all in order to keep herself from succumbing to the very thing she hated: giving up. In a way she saw a bit of herself in Filia and if it wasn't for the happiness she displayed with her companions it would've been a mirror image.

Cerebella eventually warmed into a smile as she continued watching the pair interact. "…Wish I had somebody looking out for me." she muttered to herself while retaining the smile she didn't even know she had.

The Player, Filia and Cerebella took it easy at the apartment for the next couple of hours. They passed the time by making small talk, playing card games at the request of Samson and his gambling interests, sharing more details on who they were: discussing their likes, dislikes and so on.

The group touched upon deeper subjects such as life goals, ambitions, desires and dreams for the future, a topic Cerebella hadn't thought of until it came up in their conversation, but even so there wasn't much for her to think on since she was exposed to the finer things at an early age thanks to the Medicis, everything except the one thing she wanted most - her response to the subject in hand, as well as Filia and the Players, were shared through inaudible exchange. The only thing that could be taken from the scene was the groups interest in hearing each other's answers with supportive smiles, looks of interest and occasional laughter in between replies.

Night soon fell and the whereabouts of the Life Gem was still unknown. Cerebella was never one to waste time when it came to carrying out Vitale's orders but, to her surprise, the time spent with Filia and the Player felt a bit more important than getting the job done as quickly as she could.

Cerebella sat on the opposite end of the couch, while Filia, along with Samson, was sound asleep down at the other end. Cerebella sat in silence, looking down to Vice Versa in its miniature form with blank gaze, lost in thought.
The Player entered the room, tapping her shoulder to get her attention, he held out a small can of soda to her. "Want one?" He offered. "They were in the fridge so I guess its complimentary or something."

Cerebella looked down to the can and then back up to the Player with a smile, she sat Vice Versa to her side and took the can from him. "Thanks."

The Player sat in the love seat by the wall, carefully opening his can so that the 'snap' wouldn't be loud enough to disturb Filia or Samson. Once the can was opened he chugged the entire soft drink in a matter of seconds, the can was small so it wouldn't have taken much to be done with it anyway.

After wiping his mouth the Player noticed a rather glum looking Cerebella, it was made all too clear that there was something on her mind. He bit his lower lip, unsure if it was a good idea to bring it up, but just sitting there wasn't making much progress either.

"You feeling ok?" The Player asked on a whim.

Cerebella heard him but didn't make eye contact - keeping her focus down to her drink. "Yeah. Just thinking I guess." She started to swirl the can around at a sluggish pace, she didn't seem too interested in drinking it.

"I'm guessing you're thinking about the thief?"

"Yeah." She nods in response, her grip on the can tightened and her expression slowly formed to a look of mild frustration. "Can't believe I let her get away like that."

"She was stronger than you anticipated but you both seemed pretty even."

Cerebella casually shrugged. "I guess." She placed her fingernail underneath the can's ring pull and, like the Player, carefully snapped it back so that it wasn't loud enough to disturb Filia. She raised the can up to her mouth and took a small sip.

"You guess? Well, then again, she did kinda kick your ass."

Cerebella nearly choked the moment she heard him, she wanted to reply quickly but she still had her mouth full of soda, she smiled behind her full mouth from seeing the Player's smug look.

"You were all like 'Ack!' and 'Oof!', I should've jumped in and saved your sorry butt." He continued to tease her.

Cerebella managed to swallow, swiping her wrist across her mouth as she smiled back at him. "MY ass got kicked? You must've been delirious from the fumes coming from your pants."

"And what's that supposed to mean?" He continued to hold his playful yet challenging smirk.

"You better check your drawers," She continued on, "I'm sure you shit yourself when we were falling off the upper boardwalk."

The Player's face scrunched up for a brief second because he was genuinely terrified of that fall, she was right about that but their talk lead to an exchange of death stares which ultimately became laughter not a few seconds later.

Filia only shifted once in her sleep from hearing them but it didn't seem to disturb her in the slightest, her body was most likely just readjusting itself for a comfortable sleep position. The Player and Cerebella saw Filia move, both their eyes were now on her as she continued to sleep peacefully.
"She looks so innocent in her sleep." Cerebella stated.

"She's innocent even when she's awake." The Player replied. "I guess that has something to do with her memory loss though. Makes me wonder who she was in her past life."

"Just stay with her and you'll find out. She'll need your company too."

"You think so, huh? Heh. It feels nice being needed." The Player crushed the empty can in his hand and stood up from the couch. "So, you ready to go?"

"Go?" She questioned.

"To find the thief. Duh. We still got a job to do and now that Filia's sleep I won't have to argue about her coming with us. Hopefully I can be back before morning."

Cerebella took the final sip, once it was empty she stood up from the sofa and crushed the can in her hand. She grabbed the miniature Vice Versa and approached the Player. "We'll get it done. Don't worry. I think I already have a lead on where she was heading."

"Yeah?"

"Mhm. It looked like she was heading toward the Grand Cathedral. I'll capture her and-"

"We'll capture her." The Player corrected.

Cerebella slouched over slightly but readjusted herself in an instant. "WE'LL capture her and take her back to Vitale."

"The Grand Cathedral…huh?"

"Something wrong?"

The Player shook his head after taking a moment to think. "Mmm. Nah. It's nothing."

"You're being weird, but whatever."

The Player rolled his eyes at Cerebella's playful claim and dismissed her by holding his hand up at her face. "Shut up and come on. Let's get this done so we can get paid."

"Don't put your hand in my face! ...Stupid."

Cerebella couldn't help but chuckle as she began to walk toward the door. The Player shook his head, casually wearing his signature smile as he began to walk after her.

"...Don't forget, kid." Samson spoke up just as the Player took the first few steps. The Player stopped in his tracks and turned to the couch Filia was sleep on. "You told Filia you'd help her get her memories back. You won't be any use to us dead."

"Could've sworn you were sleep. You get off to listening in on other people's conversation? Heh. Anyway, have some faith in me, will ya? I'm not gonna die. I need you guys just as much as you need me."

"We don't need you. We were fine until you came along, but now you've connected yourself with Filia on a personal level and it's made things more complicated."

"Complicated how?"
"Look, just make sure you don't die. If something happened to you it'll affect Filia and in turn it affects me as well. That's the last thing I need."

The Player faced forward after giving it some thought. "Fine. I'm glad to see you care. I'll be back soon. Sleep well." He carried on, making his way out of the apartment. The sound of the front door opening and closing marked his absence.

"How the hell did he get himself involved with the Medicis? If anybody in that organization gets wind of Filia's condition everything I've done would've been for nothing. I can't let anything stop me now. I've come too far…I don't know what'll happen to you, kid but whatever happens just know that it wasn't personal."

Samson let out a long sigh after Filia nudges in her sleep at his words. It was unclear how the parasite was feeling on a personal level, or if he even actually cared about the Player and his well being, but he was absolutely adamant on seeing these unknown plans of his to the very end.

The Player and Cerebella were back on the case of the stolen Life Gem. Their travels have lead them to the Grand Cathedral. The cathedral was all too familiar for the Player, it was the sight of Double, the unholy abomination he and Filia encountered just the other day. The sight was still engraved within his mind, he shuttered just thinking about it.

"There it is." Cerebella pointed as they walked down the stone path leading to the large double door entrance of the church. "Nadia has to be somewhere around here. I can feel it."

"Uh…y-yeah. Yep. I bet…the same thing. M-Mhm." The Player was obviously paranoid. He was frequently looking over his shoulder as if something was watching him. Cerebella noticed how strange he was acting and raised a brow in confusion. "H-Huh?" His voice cracked in fear, "You say something, B-Bella?"

"No? Are you feeling ok? You're acting strange." 

"I'm not scared. You're scared! Especially you, Cerebella!"

"What are you talking about?"

"…Ok, look, last time I was here things didn't go so well."

"You've been here before?"

"Unfortunately yes. The things I've seen behind those doors has mentally scarred me. I'll never be able to get the horrors out of my mind."

"Aaaw. You're scared. That's cute." Cerebella's condescending tone couldn't be more apparent, she wrapped her arm around the Player's neck and brought him into a hug that resembled a headlock, "You don't have to worry little man. I'll handle all the scary stuff."

"No, I'm serious. There was this creepy nun looking chick. She was kinda cute at first. She had a nice hour glass like body. Her breasts were pretty impressive and it looked like she had a booty for days…not to mention she-" He suddenly felt Cerebella's lock on his neck tighten, "Aaah! Uh, yeah, she was a blonde too."

Cerebella unwrapped her arm from around his neck and placed her hand on her hip, "That's it? You're scared of a nun?"
"No. I didn't even get to what got me so creeped out. She opened her mouth and turned inside out."

"Turned inside…out?"

"It was something like that. I can't really describe it. There was also this nurse looking lady. Her breasts were like 'POW!', honestly they may have been a little bigger than yours."

"Shut up." Cerebella went back to focusing on more important matters. She approached the church's entrance and slowly opened one of the double doors, just enough to get a peek inside. "Oh…look!"

"I'm getting déjà vu…." The Player hesitantly approached the church and peeked inside from the opposite side of the door. Inside was the cat thief, Nadia, at the mercy of the nurse, Valentine. The Player quickly identified her. "Uh! That's her! That's the nurse lady."

"You sure?" Cerebella asked while looking over to him.

He nods in response, "Yeah. Definitely. I recognize those E cups anywhere."

"…You're pathetic. I bet they're fake too."

"Jealous much?" His playfully smarmy attitude was used as teasing fuel.

Meanwhile, Valentine had Nadia laying on the floor, apparently in defeat and in pieces, her limbs were scattered about the church's floor before her. "…Despite being mutilated so, the Feral's body still lives. Simply amazing. I must perform more tests." She grinned with an enthusiastic smirk.

Cerebella grit her teeth and knew something had to be done, if Valentine got her hands on Nadia things would only get more complicated. "Tests? To hell with that. Player, we've got to do something."

"Yeah. But we shouldn't just charge in like idiots. I think we should come up with a plan and then-"

'BOOM!' The church's double door was kicked in and Cerebella rushed in to confront the voluptuous nurse, "Hands off that cat!" Cerebella called out while pointing to Valentine, "The Medici's have a score to settle with her."

"You freaking idiot!" The Player could be heard shouting from the church's entrance. Knowing the gig was up he walked in and stood beside Cerebella, he was going to make sure he didn't make the same mistake he made with Filia just a day prior. He was going to stay by Cerebella's side.

Valentine couldn't help but smile at the appearance of Cerebella. She didn't seem too surprised, almost as if she was expecting company sent from the powerful mafia family, "…Did you hear that, kitty? The Medici's lapdog has come to save you! And she's brought the newbie. Sorry, but there's no way I'm giving up my new toy."

The Player leaned over toward Cerebella, holding his hand in front of his mouth so that Valentine couldn't see what he was about to whisper, "Why? I bet you have plenty that vibrate back at home." Cerebella nearly cracked in laughter but she kept her composure, gently elbowing the Player's side.

"We have plenty of playtime ahead in the lab." Valentine continued. The Player only let out a single 'Ha!' in retort. "Double! We have work to do!"

"Double?" The Player asked unaware of the blonde nun standing directly behind him.

"Ignorant children." a demonic sounding voice creeped up behind him. Hearing the familiar voice
sent a chilling shiver up the Player's spine making him jump in fear and into Cerebella's arms. She was now holding him bridle style as he shivered in fear.

"THAT'S HER! THAT'S HER!" He shouts in a panic.

Cerebella tried her best to keep him up but his constant movement made it difficult to keep her balance. "That nun lady you were talking about? She does fit the profile…look, Player, we're gonna have to fight. Vitale said you'd be useful so now I think it's time for you to show me what you're made of."

"Bull-Shit. I'm not fighting that demon!"

"Fine. Then handle the nurse."

The Player took a look over to Valentine. She didn't seem like much of a threat. She was a beautiful woman with all the right features. Valentine noticed his look and smiled at him…being the fool he was he mistook it for a seductive hint that she wanted 'something' more from him. He got himself off of Cerebella and brushed his shoulders off, acting as if he didn't just display his cowardice. "Ok. I can do that. Have fun!" He happily skipped over to his opponent.

Cerebella sighs and shook her head before taking Vice Versa and placing it on her head, once it was securely fitted onto its user the large, bulky arms reappeared in their intimidating stature.

Now that the performer was ready Double smiles and opens her eyes only to reveal nothing but a crimson red in her sockets. Double threw her arm forward and stretched it out toward Cerebella, her long arm had the appearance of what seemed to be multiple human-like faces with empty eye sockets and mouths, hinting at a frozen state of screaming agony.

Double grabs Cerebella's wrist, much to the latter's shock, and retracts her extendable arm, pulling her along.

Cerebella quickly thinks of a counterattack and just as she gets within range of Double she lifts her feet off of the ground and shoved her heels into Double's chest. Double is clearly unfazed by Cerebella's kick but there was more to it than that, Cerebella grins as the sound of piercing flesh could be heard. Double looks down and sees two hidden blades sticking out from the heel of Cerebella's boots, the blades were long enough to pierce through the other side of Double's body.

Seeing that she made contact Cerebella kicks off of her and frees herself from the monsters grip. With Vice Versa's help she back flips away to get some distance.

"Heh. You like that? I'm full of surprises too." Cerebella's smirk spoke for her ego.

Blood drips from the holes in Double's chest but despite the injury Double's expression remained unchanged, her lifeless smile and red eyes met with Cerebella's look of confidence. Before long the holes in Double's body began to heal before her opponent.

'She can heal herself?' Cerebella thought to herself in a calm state of mind. 'Damn. How am I supposed to get through something like that?'

"What's the matter, child? Why do you hesitate? Are you afraid?"

Double's taunt reaches Cerebella resulting in a huff from the younger fighter, "I'm not afraid of anything. I'm just thinking about how sweet it's gonna be once I beat you. The Player tells me you're some kind of monster."
"Did he?" She chuckled, amused by the comment. "Humans are the real monsters."

The Player casually strolled his way over to Valentine, standing before her with his head held high. "Well, sweetness, let me be the first to tell you: you're pretty hot. I wouldn't mind having you give me a checkup."

"Pfft!" Valentine was taken aback by how corny he was. "Is that right?" She continued to smile gleefully.

"Hell yeah. Have you seen yourself in the mirror? You're all…boom!" He motioned his hands to gesture an hourglass figure the moment he 'boom'ed her. "Specifically you're all so perfect in the chest area."

"Flattery will get you everywhere."

"Even in bed?"

"Yep."

"…If you're not pulling my leg I guess we could, y'know, slip out the back and-"

In the blink of an eye Valentine vanished without a trace. Before the Player could even react to her disappearance a seductive voice whispered pleasantly into his ear, "A hospital bed." Valentine reappeared behind him and proceeded to deliver a swift kick to his side, the blow sent the boy flying across the church, his body hit the floor multiple times before crashing into a nearby pillar with enough force to destroy it.

After striking him Valentine placed her foot back on the floor, meanwhile yhe Player sat in a pile of rubble — rubbing the back of his head. There was a heavy cloud of dust in his surrounding area.

"...How did that not kill me?" He managed to stand, coughing and swinging his hand around to lift the lingering dust from around him. "Aaaah, where is she?"

The moment he asked Valentine appeared before him, nearly nose to nose. He flinches back as she grabs his arm to prevent an escape.

"I'm here."

A loud 'WHACK!' could be heard and the Player is sent tumbling out of the dust cloud.

Cerebella, who was still fighting against Double, noticed the Player being overwhelmed while hopping from bench to bench with Double giving chase in her nun form.

The performer lands on the back of the last wooden bench only to be met with the speedy appearance of Double, who flash steps before her, swinging her long tentacle-like arm for Cerebella’s side, luckily she reacts fast enough and jumped into the air, having Double destroy the bench instead. Cerebella lands back on the floor and summersaults to break her fall.

"She's pretty fast. Player! How're you holding up?" She couldn't take her eyes off of Double for a second, she had to wait for a response to check on her partner.

"HEEEEEELP!"

Hearing him made Cerebella face his direction for a split second, but just as she did so Double quickly charged for her. Cerebella faced forward only to be greeted by Double's red eyes.
The nun lunged her fist forward only for Cerebella to block the attack with an open palm, Double pulled back and swung with a left, Cerebella bent backwards and performed another successful dodge. Cerebella pulled herself back up and bashed Vice Versa's hard bone-like structure against Double's head with a vicious head-butt. Double retaliates and takes a few steps back.

Meanwhile the Player could be seen running away and narrowly dodging flying syringes in the background. He was completely helpless against Valentine who was simply toying with him, if anything she was enjoying herself.

Valentine withdrew another syringe from hammerspace and threw it toward the Player who was running toward a wall. As he found himself cornered he turned back in Valentine's direction only to see the syringe flying toward him — he closed his eyes and yelped loudly with his back against the wall.

The sound of the needle striking the wall got his attention, he opened one eye to find that he was unharmed. He opened the other and blinked three times before looking around to make sure he wasn't dead, but when he took a look down he noticed the syringe between his legs, just BARELY missing his family jewels. His eyes widened and he broke out into a mild sweat.

Valentine was standing beside him with her back against the same wall, she was taking a bite out of a chocolate bar she had gotten from between her cleavage. "Could you imagine if I actually wanted to hit you?" She asked with a smile.

The Player didn't respond as he was frozen in fear, yet also relief.

"You're actually a fun time. You're weak, and obviously have no fighting experience, but it's cute. Maybe if I experiment on you I could turn you into a real man. An enhanced super solider."

"I like my body as it is now….t-th-thanks…."

"Well that's no fun. You should really learn to take risks, then again, you took a risk coming here again. You're brave." She took another bite out of the chocolate in one hand and with the other she reached for the syringe, prying it out of the wall. "There is something unique about you though. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I know there's something special about you. It's getting me more and more curious to knowing what it is."

"N-Nope. Nothing special here…I'm just some random guy about to piss himself."

"Don't be such a coward. There's nothing to be afraid of, my experiments are very exciting. Unfortunately, not all can be a success though, but I'm sure you'll be up for it. Side effects may include: nausea, headaches…and death!"

The Player heard enough and he was finally able to regain control over himself as he slowly began to move away from Valentine who gave him a menacing death stare from her previous comment.

"Oh! Would you look at the time. I gotta go shit and throw up.” What he didn't know was that Valentine only said that to get him running again, she was in the mood for another chase.

Cerebella and Double were still at a stalemate, both girls throwing out powerful blows and blocking before any damage was dealt to either side. Cerebella is sent sliding back after blocking another one of Double's attacks, she regains her footing and sees the Player running in their direction from behind Double. He quickly runs past the nun and finally toward his partner.

"Hey, you don't look so good. You been getting your ass kicked?" Cerebella asked as he came to a stop in front of her.
"Oh shut up. That nurse chick is a goddamn ninja. I can't win against that."

Valentine walked up to Double and stood by her side, still maintaining her menacing smile. "I'm surprised you've lasted as long as you did." The nurse teased.

The Player turned back and saw Valentine was still giving chase, he was powerless against her and knew there was nothing he could do. She was almost as scary as Double, the only difference was that she was really sexy...which strangely made it a little better for him. Better than than dying to a monster.

He took Cerebella's hand and gave it a slap. "I'm tagging you in." He dropped her hand and ran for cover.

"Wait, aren't you gonna fight?" She asked while watching him flee behind one of the benches.

He held up one of his arms from his safe place and gave a thumbs up. "I have faith in you!"

A few seconds later Cerebella felt a jolt of energy surge through her body, she could feel herself becoming charged with power. This strange and sudden phenomenon wasn't visible to Double or Valentine, the only thing they saw was a motionless Cerebella still looking over to the bench where the Player was hiding.

The young circus performer wasn't sure what was going on but everything she was feeling felt amazing — she had never felt so energized in her life. She looks down to her twitching palms and witnessed small electrical sparks flash around her hands. "...W-What is this? What's happening to me? This feels amazing."

Valentine huffed at Cerebella having her back turned to her opponents and faced Double. "Hey, let's just get this over with. We'll kill them and then handle the Feral." Valentine quickly drew a scalpel and made a quick dash for Cerebella with her amazing speed.

Cerebella seemed fully aware of everything that was going on around her and cracked a confident smirk, she clenched her fists and turned to her attackers, Vice Versa then buried its fingers into the floor and began to lift the ground before them.

Valentine witnessed this and was amazed at the sight, she tried to stop herself but the traction caused her to slide across the ground.

Vice Versa's brute strength tears a giant hole in the church's floor, sending it high up into the air, Cerebella then positions and lines herself up for the next step in her attack. When the large chunk of floor descends back to their level Vice Versa winds back its massive fist and gave it the strongest punch it could deliver, jettisoning it toward the unsuspecting Valentine.

The impact from Vice Versa's punch was unbelievable, the piece of earth it picked up seems to have transformed the rock into a shimmering diamond, that's better left unexplained because I don't know how that works, the large jewel was propelled toward Valentine at a blinding rate, striking her with devastating force. The large gem didn't stop there, it was sent flying toward Double who was struck with Valentine's body, the two were thrown back into the church's alter and large concrete statue of an unnamed goddess.

The impact let off a near deafening 'boom' throughout the area, shattering the church's stained glass windows in the process.

The Player felt the ground shake and was curled up in a defensive ball as minor drops of debris fell onto him from the ceiling. Once things settled down he poked his head out from cover to check the
battle and to his surprise the only one standing was Cerebella.

"Whoa, you won? I mean…you won! Kickass." He jogged over to Cerebella and gave her a pat on the shoulder. "WE did it. I was pretty amazing with that little cowardly display I put on, right? Thanks to me they let their guard down and you were able to get your time in the spotlight too. By the way why is there a big ass hole in the ground? Did you do that? I was only in cover for like a minute."

"...Yeah. It was me but I don't know what happened. I just had this sudden burst of power. It felt great. I've never felt so strong in my life."

"Maybe it was the adrenaline. You seem like an adrenaline junkie."

"I do dangerous stuff like this almost every day. This was no ordinary rush. It happened right after you tagged my hand." She looked down to her right palm and then over to the Player. "Did you do something to me?"

"No. All I did was touch your hand and run. Maybe you're thinking too much. You're stronger than you look."

Cerebella knew exactly what she felt and there was something that occurred in that very instant he made contact with her. Before she could argue Double sprouts from the rubble, holding an injured and unconscious Valentine.

"What the hell?! She's still able to move?" The Player quickly hid behind Cerebella, using her as a shield.

Double stood in a state of calm, she had dirt, light bruises and her habit damaged with a few cuts here and there. "You possess far greater talent than I anticipated, Player."

"Me?"

"The power to bring out the true potential of those worthy of achieving the Skull Heart's power."

"Cerebella, I have no idea what the hell she's talking about."

"..."

"Cerebella? You listening to me?"

Cerebella's mind was clearly focused on other things as she looked around for Nadia, who was now missing. "...Damnit, that thief snuck off while we were fighting!"

The Player's forehead was met with a gentle slap of his own palm. "That's all you're worried about?" He asked in disbelief.

"Your quarry has entered the catacombs." Double intervened to answer Cerebella's question. "To complete her vengeance against the Medici's, she will confront the Skullgirl and claim the Skull Heart for herself. The Skull Heart can give you anything you desire…even the love of another."

Double's explanation seemed a bit provoking to the Player, he couldn't help but notice that Double was talking as if she was trying to seduce Cerebella into considering the Skull Heart's power.

The ability to grant any wish is certainly a desire most people would take if the choice was offered to them, the Player's entire reason for being in the Canopy Kingdom relates to this, the power to make a
single wish come true…a blessing but at what cost? Based on the passage he read, before arriving, the user will transform into a powerful monster of corruption if their heart is impure but what exactly is impurity? You get what you want but you lose what you had.

It had just occurred to the Player that this 'love of another' Double spoke of goes directly to her feelings for Vitale. He took a look over Cerebella's shoulder and noticed her look of curiosity and wonder.

"The love of another…?" Cerebella asked in a state of emotional vulnerability. "Can it really-?"

Seeing the young and naïve Cerebella consider the bait caused Double to smile. "Yes and so much more." She added.

"Don't listen to her, Cerebella." The Player got from behind her and stood by her side with his hand placed firmly on her shoulder to get her attention, she turned to the Player only to find him looking on toward Double. "It sounds nice, doesn't it? The power to grant any wish, that's amazing, but let's not get sidetracked here. We've got a job to do. Forget the Skull Heart. We need the Life Gem. Besides, we can make our own happy endings. We don't need some Skull Heart to grant that for us — it's already within our power. Where's the fun in living if we have to be given what we can achieve on our own?" He faced Cerebella with a smile.

Double's smile quickly reverted to a scowl now that her plot was foiled.

Cerebella wasn't expecting to hear this from the Player, but his words hit home and she concurred with a smile in return. "You know what? For once, you're right. Vitale's counting on me to get that gem."

"Us." He corrected in a dull tone.

"Right, right, of course." She casually played off his exclusion.

On the wall to the right a secret passage way leading to the lower catacombs caught the attention of the Medici muscle duo. The Player recognized the passage and knew what was waiting for them down below.

"That's the way leading to the catacombs right? We don't have any time to lose." Naturally Cerebella was the first to charge headlong toward the entrance, leading the charge to the Skull Heart. "Let's go!"

The Player reached his hand out to her but he knew there was no stopping her, he had to back her up. He swallowed whatever fear he had left and with it took the first step, however the floor underneath him suddenly flashed white, he was blinded by the newborn light and covered his eyes for protection. Everything was devoured by the light.

A few seconds later the Player began to open his eyes only to find himself standing alone in white limbo.

"Where am I? …Wait, what happened to Cerebella? How do I get back?"

"Don't worry." A familiar voice spoke to him from behind, he quickly turned to the voice and before him was the Skullgirl, Marie. "You're safe."

"You again?"

"I've been watching you since our last encounter. You never cease to surprise me."
"Everything? Even when I was getting my ass kicked by ninja nurse boobs?"

"Ninja nurse? Do you mean Valentine? Yes. I've seen it all."

"Damn it. Well, whatever, I need to get back to the church because my friend is on her way down to your creepy domain to find some thief. I need to be there and help her."

"Your 'friend'. Cerebella, isn't it? She is pure, at least compared to the company that keeps her."

"The circus, the Medicis or me?"

"The Medicis."

"Ah. Yeah. They're pretty messed up. How do you think I got involved in all of this?"

"I know. It's unfortunate you got involved with their crimes. I cannot allow them to claim the Skull Heart. To eradicate them I must destroy everyone associated to them."

The Player took a precautionary step backward.

"Not you. You were forced to do their dirty work."

"But…that would mean you plan on taking out Cerebella. She's been a part of their organization since she was just a little girl."

Marie was already well aware of this and didn't reply, the Player waited to see if she would speak on the matter but silence continued to hold between them, Marie's mind was set on her goal of complete eradication of the Medicis.

"You can't kill her. She's my friend."

"There are more qualified individuals who can take her place. You shouldn't associate yourself with someone who will willing take the life of the innocent."

"But Cerebella isn't like that. She's nothing like the Medicis. She'll do their dirty work when it comes to fighting, sure, but that's to be expected - she's a fighter and bit of a tomboy, but she would never take anyone's life."

"Are you certain of this?"

"She told me herself: 'I bruise but I don't take lives,' and she's proven that. If you've been watching me then you know what I'm talking about."

"Her obsession will lead to a path of darkness. Her desperate search for acceptance will corrupt her heart. Her blind loyalty will be her demise. Her journey is leading to this pivotal change, the Cerebella you know will be gone forever."

"…Sounds like you caught on too. Was it really that obvious? She needs to do a better job at concealing her feelings. But I digress. Whatever she does she's doing it for the love of that Vitale guy. I put two and two together the moment I realized how attached she was to him, willing to do whatever he said at a moment's notice, but I believe there's only so much she'll do before finally realizing when enough is enough. She won't let him change her into something she's not. I have faith in that. You can't kill my friend."

Marie closed her eyes and sighs. "Do you believe in destiny?" She asked.
"Destiny? Eh. I played it before, and it's 'ok, I guess. I'm more of a Halo guy."

"What? No…you fool, I- ugh, some things are better shown than explained."

The distance between the Player and Marie began to extend despite neither of them moving, the farther the two got from one another the more they began to fade away.

"Wait!" The Player called out to Marie. "What's going on?"

"Go and see what lies ahead for your friend. As per your request I won't kill her. The life she will be forced to live will be much worse than death."

Her vague explanation only raised more confusion for the Player. He had questions but it was too late. The light that once surrounded him became an endless void of darkness.

"Pla…!" A faint voice called out from the abyss.

"…"

"Playe…!" The voice became more audible the second time around.

"Hm?"

"Player! Wake up!"

The Player's vision slowly began to return to him. Though blurry at first his sight continuously improved the more he came back to his senses. Cerebella was crouched down on one knee holding him up in her arms, she began to smile once she noticed his eyes were open, though half-lidded.

"You're okay!" She exclaimed with a smile showing her joy.

"I…can see…the light."

"What?"

"It's…beautiful. The light…" His hand slowly rises from the ground, shaking wearily as if he barely had any strength left.

"N-No. Don't go toward the light! It's bad!"

"I can't help it…it's so beautiful."

His hand continued to rise, it appeared as if he was trying to reach out toward this 'light' he described. When one mentions the light at the end of the tunnel it usually marks the call of death.

Cerebella's smile faded as she witnessed her friend descending into death's cold embrace. "Player!" She called out his name once more in a desperate attempt to keep him from going…

Grope…grobe…

"What the-?" Cerebella felt a strange grip coming from her chest. She looked down and noticed the Player's right hand was groping her left breast.

Squish…squish…

The Player continued playing dead whilst his fingers sank into the softness of her warm bosom. It
was clear, or at least now, that he was faking his critical state. Cerebella let the realization sink in for a moment before staring at him with an unimpressed glare.

Cerebella removed her arms from around his head and had him drop to the ground, she stood up and brushed off her knees.

"Ow! …Ha. Worth it." The Player picked himself up and sat on the ground, rubbing the back of his head with a smile of accomplishment plastered all over his face before he came to realize he wasn't on the upper level of the church as he was when he was mysteriously transported to see Marie. "Uuh, what happened?"

"You don't remember? When we came down here you just collapsed and then I had to fight off these skeleton soldiers."

"What happened to Marie?"

"Who?"

"Marie. She's the—...I was—...eh, it's nothing. I was probably just dreaming."

'Will you be able to live with yourself knowing what he's going to make you do?'

An inaudible voice questioning Cerebella put the girl on alert, her cautiousness was met with a bright blue light that flashed before the two, helping illuminate the once dim lit catacombs — this light was coming from none other than the ancient artifact itself, the Skull Heart, which seemingly materialized out of nowhere and without the Skullgirl.

Cerebella and the Player were left to marvel over the all-powerful skull that levitated before them. Cerebella carefully approached the Skull Heart, it seemed safe and nothing was going wrong. Vice Versa reached out its massive hand and placed it underneath the floating artifact as if it was holding it within its grasp.

"So this is it: the Skull Heart, the source of the Skullgirls power. But…where is the Skullgirl?" Cerebella questioned.

The Player quickly jumped up and scurried over to Cerebella. "H-Hey! You're not about to make a wish are you?!" He seemed like he was in a minor panic.

"No. Forget the wish…why are you being so twitchy?"

The Player finally had the heart in his grasp, it was right there…the reason he's endured horrifying sights, agreed to helping the mafia and getting his ass kicked by a nurse was floating before him. He could feel the seduction of his greed coursing through his veins.

"Twitchy? Twitchy?! I'm not twitchy! How about…I, uh, hold that Skull Heart for you while you, uuuuum, y'know…"

This new attitude was beginning to creep her out but she paid him no mind seeing as how there was a bigger task at hand for Cerebella. "You can sit here and be weird all you want. I need to find that thief and bring her back to Vitale."

"Then do THAT, and give me the HEART!" He pleaded.

From the shadows of the catacombs Nadia leaped into action, making a reach for the Skull Heart while Cerebella was temporarily distracted. "Thanks for dealing with Marie for me, circus-girl!"
The Player and Cerebella were shocked at Nadia's sudden appearance and barely had time to react. The feral stretched her extendable arms out for the heart, it was just within her reach but Cerebella's quick thinking managed to intervene by having Vice Versa grab a hold of Nadia's entire body with one hand. The cat was now trapped and struggled to break free, but continued restlessly to find her freedom.

Vice Versa ensured a deadlock grip, it brought the second hand in and wrapped Nadia in a tight ball lock hold. It was a close call that Cerebella managed to prevent.

"Ha! Player, I got her!"

He was too occupied with holding the heart in his hands to pay the situation any mind, his legs were trembling in joy. He practically wasn't there.

"...Let me go!" Nadia yelled out from the small opening in Vice Versa's palms she managed to pry open. "I've got to avenge my friends...no, my family! With one wish I can end the Medici mafia!"

"I can't let you make that wish." Cerebella rejected Nadia's claim. "That's MY family you're talking about now!"

The fierce determination on Nadia's face became apparent, she could care less about Cerebella's 'family' and summoned her inner strength — the passion and memory for her deceased loved ones, and with it continued to force her way out from Vice Versa's violent hold.

"With or without my wish, I'll destroy them! As long as the Life Gem flows through my veins, no one can stop me from avenging the Fishbone Gang!"

Nadia and Cerebella were on two opposite sides, their loyalties made it clear that they were ever going to see eye-to-eye, it was bound to be an endless cycle of cat and mouse, but that didn't stop Cerebella from seeing the sadness in Nadia's burning eyes during their struggle, unfortunately at that moment compassion wasn't on her mind. She then thought back to Vitale's words 'By any means necessary'. There wasn't much time to think, the clock was ticking and Nadia was dead set on seeing her goals come to fruition.

Cerebella grit her teeth and shut her eyes at the only choice she had, she could feel her heart ache at the very thought of what she was going to force herself to do in order to see her mission through.

"...Flow's through your veins, huh?" Cerebella opened her eyes and revealed a lifeless glare in her once bright eyes.

Vice Versa applied even more pressure to its grip, apparently not being held back by the constraints of morals, reflecting the personal feelings of its wielder. Nadia was powerless to stop the awesome power of a living weapon and could only scream from the pain she endured, it was loud enough to catch the attention of the Player, who snapped out of his trance from the Skull Heart — his sight was now set on the Cerebella crushing a helpless Nadia.

"...Whoa, Cerebella? Cerebella!" He looked back to the Skull Heart and then back over to Cerebella. His legs didn't want to move away but his heart was telling him to get over and save his friend. "...Dammit." He muttered under his breath, releasing the Skull Heart and rushing over to the violent scene. "What are you doing?!" He asked as he placed his hand on her shoulder, "You're crushing her!"

"Stay back. I'm going to end this...and we can go back home and be done with this!"
"But…what about-?"

"It has to be done. She won't comply and return the Life Gem. Vitale's orders were by any means necessary. Reason didn't work so now we do things the hard way!"

"Nnngg- GAAAAAHHHHH!" Nadia's screams made the Player realize the seriousness of the situation. He looked on helplessly as Nadia was crushed even more.

"No. No, this isn't you. You're not going to kill her, Cerebella. There's a better way to do this. You can't honestly believe taking her life is the right thing to do. You never believed in the life the Medic's lived and you know that. You told me yourself 'I bruise but I don't kill', or did you forget that? What exactly has Nadia done wrong? Her friends were killed and thrown away, she survived only to witness the horror of loss. You know what they did to her was horrible but you act as if it doesn't bother you because they're your 'family'. I get you love them but that doesn't make it right, does it?"

Cerebella's heart couldn't lie, everything the Player said was on point. She never wanted to take the life of anyone, she was only willing to go so far as long as it meant keeping Vitale happy but what good would that bring if she had to be miserable for the rest of her life? Carrying the blood of the innocent on her hands. Cerebella's silence spoke for itself. Nadia, who had stopped fighting back against Vice Versa's grip, watched quietly, she was speechless with the Player calming Cerebella down but even more so from the fact that he was siding with her despite working for the Medici's.

"See? You know this isn't right. I know you don't want to hear it but, please, let her go."

"Let her go? Are you crazy?! We finally have her in our grasp!"

"I know. I know. But she's suffered enough. Cerebella, I promise you, things will work out in the end. Vitale might not be happy but we can cover it up. Don't let him change you into something you're not. I'd rather fail and risk the mafia coming after me than having you lose your soul and be something you're not for the rest of your life. Just please, let her go."

There was a whirlwind of emotions brewing in Cerebella's heart. She refused to allow the only opportunity she had slip out of her hands, especially after getting so close, however there was no way she could find it in herself to end Nadia's life. The story Nadia shared with them back in Little Innsmouth shed a bit of light on the true horror behind the Medici's way of handling business. The Player stood on the edge of his seat, praying she would make the right choice.

Cerebella closed her eyes and reopened them to Nadia, letting out a scream of frustration. Vice Versa eventually opened its hands, thus having Nadia fall and drop to the ground. Cerebella balled up her fist and threw a full powered punch toward a nearby pillar, her anger numbing the pain as blood ran down her fist. She damaged her knuckles from the force alone.

"Screw it!" She yelled out. Nadia and the Player stood in silence as she vented her frustration. She turned to the thief and pointed to the exit. "Get the hell out of here. Next time I see you messing with the Medicis and causing us trouble, I assure you…we will end it once and for all."

Nadia looks over to the Player for some form of guidance since she didn't know how to handle the current turn of events, he faced her and slowly nodded, prompting her to take prompting her to take the leave. She knew the Player was taking a great risk by letting her go and lying about the events, convincing the leg breaker alone was an impressive feat. If it were anybody else chances are Nadia would've been dead already.

The feral stood up and made her way toward the stairs leading out of the catacomb's, her eyes met
with the Player's as she passed him, a look of sincere gratitude on her face before departing from him.

With Nadia gone all that was left for the Player and Cerebella was to return to the Medici tower and report in.

The duo left the catacomb's and the Grand Cathedral shortly after, it was a quiet walk down the road. The Player knew Cerebella was still mad about everything that happened, but he was happy with how things turned out, it was better to leave with failure than a choice that would haunt Cerebella for the rest of her life.

He slowly built up the heart to break silence between them, even getting confident enough to walk closer to her. "...I know you pretty much hate me now, Cerebella, and I shouldn't really be talking to you, but I just wanted to say that I'm proud of you. You did the right thing. Be proud of yourself."

"Yeah. Fantastic, a successful goddamn job. We sure did great. We let the thief get away and we're coming back empty handed. We sure have a lot to be happy for. You've made this mission a complete bust and wasted my time."

It was clear, and obviously expected, that she was still sore about everything, her tone alone was proof of this. The Player didn't want to make the situation worse but now that they were finally talking he knew there was more that had to be said.

"Heh...you don't need to be so cold about it."

"Well, I'm sorry if you're getting your feelings hurt, but I honestly don't care how you feel." Her piercing eyes intimidated him to a degree but he faced her anger head on, as a way of taking responsibility for failing the mission. "It was such a hard decision and I can't believe you talked me out of doing what I needed to do. It was right there...right in MY hands!"

"Do you know why you spared her?"

"I don't know!" She exclaimed angrily before realizing what her answer was, she was surprised at herself and calmed down not two seconds later "...I don't know. I would give anything to keep Vitale happy, retrieving the Life Gem would've made him ecstatic. I've lived my entire life going unnoticed. I did everything for him. To have him see me for more than what I could do for him. There were times I wanted to give up, but I'm too stubborn to do that."

"You're in love with Vitale, right?"

She didn't answer, but it was made obvious from the start and throughout their travels there was more to Cerebella's views on him than just being a father figure.

"I don't mean to lecture you, but...you're a young woman. You've got nothing but time ahead of you. You don't need to bother with such a heavy burden. Trying to force someone to love you isn't the best way to live. Think about it, even if you took Nadia's life would that make him stop you from doing it again? Do you think it'd make him appreciate you more or just make him see that you're always willing to do as he says without having to think about it? Don't let him use your love as a means to manipulate you. I get that you see the Medicis as your family but you can't use that to justify the bad things you do."

"I'm not trying to justify anything! I just...I just..." She stopped walking and stood still, hanging her head in shame.
"Cerebella?" He stopped as well once he noticed her. The moment he called her name he was brought into a hug by Cerebella. He wasn't expecting this and didn't know how to react to Cerebella's hold.

In her mind the images of herself nearly killing Nadia played over and over again, the young performer was disgusted by her own actions and was horrified that she almost managed to lose herself to selfish desire. The more she thought about it the tighter her hold on the Player became.

"Thank you." She muttered softly.

He was hit by another unforeseen act of gratitude from Cerebella, but as he let it sink in he understood the meaning behind her embrace. He smiles down to her and wrapped his arms around her, returning the hug.

"You're welcome." He replied with a supportive pat to her back.

Cerebella couldn't help but smile into his chest, this was a bit unlike her to show such emotion, but their time together has provided the young fighter with a life changing experience that helped her grow.

Later that night the two return back in the neon lit city of New Meridian, arriving at Medici Tower, the base of operation for the titular Medici family, to report in to a waiting Vitale who was waiting for them in the tower's apex, this being the location of Lorenzo Medici's office. Vitale stood by the large window looking out to the beautiful neon city as the Player and Cerebella stood side by side at the front of the desk.

"So, you weren't able to get the Life Gem back."

"...No sir." Cerebella hesitantly answered. She was feeling the pressure of failure knowing he wasn't pleased with their results. "The Life Gem's power proved to be greater than what I could've prepared for. I'm very sorry, Vitale." She proceeded to bow apologetically.

The mobster held a glass of scotch in his hand, swirling it around before taking a drink. "Don't blame yourself, child. It's my fault."

"Huh?" His words caused Cerebella to look up from her previous stance.

"It was my fault for trusting this mission to you. I knew I should've went with one of the higher ups in the organization, Dahlia would've gotten the job done."

Cerebella felt her heart shatter, but she closed her eyes and continued to hang her head in shame. Despite knowing this was sure to be the case after she returned it still hurt more than anything to hear it from the one she loved most.

"Now we're going to have to send better forces to hunt the thief down. You've always been weak, Cerebella."

"Y-Yes, sir. I deeply apologize for my performance."

The Player couldn't take seeing Cerebella in such emotional pain, the reason they failed was his fault after all, so he took a step ahead of Cerebella and placed his hand on the desk. "There's no need to blame her. It was my fault."

"You?" Vitale questioned.
"Yeah. It turns out the thief lead us right to the Skullgirl's domain. We met the Skullgirl and had to fight her off, it was a challenge and we were lucky to make it out with our lives. Cerebella wanted to keep fighting, but I convinced her it was best to make a tactical retreat. If you think we were going to take the Skullgirl on, with just the two of us, you've lost your mind. It ain't happenin' captain."

Vitale stood in silence as he listened to the Player's explanation, it wasn't too farfetched as the Medicis has had bad blood with the recent Skullgirl, Marie.

"The Skullgirl, huh? I see…even with your power there was nothing you could do, Player?"

"Bruh, I still have no idea what the hell you're talking about. I have no power."

"Hm. Maybe you're not the one."

"Aren't you a little too old to believe in this 'chosen one' nonsense? You pulled your car on the side of the road and dragged me along. What if I was a cop?" Kind of a stupid thing to say in the heart of a mafia base. "…Not that I am a cop or anything."

Vitale chuckled and finished his scotch. He faced the two and walked over to the desk where he took a seat in the chair. "I guess I have to take some share of the blame then. If I had known the feral had connections with the Skullgirl I would've sent in more muscle."

"Great. Can I go now?"

Vitale reached over to one of the drawers behind the desk and took out a roll of money, tossing it over to the Player who just barely managed to catch it. He didn't know what it was at first but once he got it in his hand and had a chance to better inspect it he saw it was a nice knot of cash. He didn't know what to think and looked back at Vitale.

"That's to make sure you keep your mouth shut. If you get pinched this meeting never happened. Got it?"

"What meeting?" He humored the gangster with a sly smile.

"Smart kid. Now get out of here."

The Player looks over to Cerebella who smiled at him, seeing this made him smirk brightly at her before he faced Vitale one last time, nodding to mark his dismissal. With the mission officially over the Player was guided out of the room by a few the generic mafia bodyguard goons.

Believing the lie the Player told him Vitale was now under the impression that the Life Gem was in the hands of the Skullgirl which was a bad state of mind to be in. The mafia and Marie were in a brutal feud, with Vitale now under the influence that they were losing the upper hand desperate actions would soon need to be taken.

The Player was escorted out of the Medici Tower and free to be on his way. He took a detour off the main road and made his way down a narrow street where nobody was around, allowing him to count his money.

"Ooooomm man! Look at how thick this money roll is! I'll be able to get a better place to stay! Some actual good food, new clothes and so much other stuff! I don't know what I did to deserve this luck but I'm not gonna complain. Not one bit! …Oh wait, wait. Damn, I actually completely forgot about the Skull Heart. It was right in my hands. Shit, all that buddy-buddy 'don't lose your soul' stuff completely shifted my mind from the wish. Actually, now that I think about it, the catacombs in that
church was where I met Marie, who is the Skullgirl, and it's also the place where I managed to actually SEE the heart with my own eyes. I get the feeling the Grand Cathedral is gonna be the spot where a lot of important stuff goes down. I'll worry about that later though, because I'm paid and things are finally looking up for me!"

What the Player didn't know was that he was being watched. At the corner of the street a SWAT-like van pulled up and blocked his path, a squadron of armed men got out of the vehicle and aimed their weapons at the Player, who quickly threw his hands into the air.

Sniper units were positioned on the rooftops and a helicopter had its searchlight pinned on him, the way he came in was also blocked with another van containing armed officers. The Player's body was covered in red dots from the laser sights equipped on the guns.

"DON'T MOVE!"

"YOU'RE COMPLETELY SURROUNDED!"

"DON'T RESIST!"

"WE'VE GOT YOU! IT'S OVER!"

"THIS IS THE BLACK EGRETS OF THE CANOPY KINGDOM! GIVE US A REASON, PUNK!"

The Player remained completely still and there was nothing but silence between them, not even an explanation on what the heck was going on. Seeing that there was this moment of awkward silence the Player opened his mouth to talk, but before he could get a word out-

"HIS MOUTH MOVED! HE'S RESISTING ARREST!"

"QUICK! WE MUST OVERREACT IMMEDIATELY!"

The officers with riot shields, from each side of the street corners, charged toward the Player.

"Wait, what?!!" He yelled out seeing them take action despite not doing anything. The officers ganged up on him, delivering a few physical assaults before finally throwing a brown bag over his head.
'Good evening everyone, and thanks for tuning in to the 5 o'clock Canopy Kingdom News. In our top story today, there have been numerous reports of Skullgirl sightings in New Meridian, leaving the Canopy Military to raise the Skullgirl Alert Level to Mauve. New Meridian citizens are advised to stay indoors, remain vigilant and report anything suspicious. This newest incarnation of the Skullgirl has yet to be identified, but our sources within the NMPD say her victims seem to be connected with the prestigious Medici family. Lorenzo Medici, the most prominent of this powerful clan, has withdrawn from the public spotlight and is believed to have gone into hiding.

Having just observed the seventh anniversary of the defeat of the previous Skullgirl, our kingdom's own Queen Nancy, Trinity bless her soul, the appearance of a new Skullgirl is a chilling development. While expected, the core of our nation is once again-

"BOR-IIIIING!" The view pans out from a view of the reporter as a loud voice interrupts the program. One of the Egret guards took his eye off of the small portable TV and looked back to a nearby cell which held the Player behind bars. He was watching the report along with the guard but has obviously shown disinterest in what was being explained. "What else is on?" He casually asked.

"Quiet, prisoner!"

"You arrested me for walking down an alley. The least you could do is provide some good TV. The news is boring. Put on some cartoons."

One of the armed guards near the Player couldn't help but overhear the conversation, he peaked back to the cell from over his shoulder. "Cartoons? What are you? Five?"

The Player now had his attention on the guard who questioned him, "Good animated shows have no limit when it comes to age. They're better than most crap on nowadays anyway and it doesn't put me to sleep."

"The news is very important. Especially when the Skullgirl is involved. With her roaming the streets it's best you pay attention to all important news flashes."

"Don't bother acknowledging him." The first guard sitting by the desk intervened, turning his attention back to the TV, "He's a prisoner and we're ordered to stand guard."

The Player peered over to the first guard sitting at the desk, shaking his head at his claims. "You mind telling me what I'm even doing in here? I didn't do anything."

"You've been sighted with the Medici's and willingly agreed to working with them. You're an accomplice to one of the most powerful crime syndicates this kingdom has ever known. Don't play dumb."

It had just occurred to the Player that they were aware of him hunting down the Life Gem with Cerebella. Vitale paid the Player to keep his mouth shut from the authorities and with the Egrets well versed on the events it could be assumed, by the Medici's standpoint, the Player ratted them out. "N-No I didn't!" He tried to deny the truth in a rather timid tone.

"We've kept tabs on you since you arrived. You can't lie to us. Princess Umbrella told us all about you. Your name, 'Player', runs deep in our kingdom's history."
The Player sighed heavily and shook his head, "That's not my name. My name is-!

"Save it." The guard interrupted, trying his hardest to focus on the TV. He and the other guards returned to their posts, rightfully carrying out their jobs now ignoring the prisoner.

"Why does everyone cut me off when I'm about to reveal my real name?"

'So once again, thanks to princess Parasoul and the Black Egrets, you can sleep easy at night. Even when this new threat has emerged. In these uncertain times, it's good to know that we can always rely on the strength and leadership of our Canopy's royal family. Good night, and goddesspeed.'

The Player walked over to his bed and sat down with his back laid up against the concrete wall. He couldn't believe he was actually arrested, but for actual good reason since he did assist the Medici's, even if the mission was a complete bust. The Egrets also confiscated his pay from Vitale making him broke with no money, nothing to bring home to Filia. Back to square one.

"...I'm bored." A young girl's voice could be heard from somewhere in the prison area. It piqued the Player's curiosity as she sounded familiar, "This is boring. Let's go home already...I want ice cream!" he got up from his bed and made his way over to the bars of his cell, he tried looking down the long hall with what little vision he had but he couldn't see much as they were further down the hallway.

An older woman could be heard as well, sighing shortly after the younger girl spoke. "You were the one who wanted to come! What did you expect?"

"Yeah, well, I changed my mind! I thought I'd get to see you beat up bad guys, using your sonic boobs, pool balls and KFC combos! You know...the good stuff! ...Not just stare at smelly prisoners for hours on end."

"It's a prison. Why would I beat up the people we already captured? Ugh. Fine, fine...we'll all put the kingdom's safety on hold for your ice cream, you little brat. Seriously, what am I going to do with you? We'll go after we return to the castle."

"Hooray! I knew all that nagging would pay off!" The Player couldn't see anything no matter how much he tried but luck would have it the two young ladies were making their way farther down the corridor and to his location. The youngest girl happily skipped her way down the cells with newfound joy in getting her way. "I scream for ice cream, I scream for ice cream!" she cheerfully sang while continuing her way down the corridor.

She skipped by the Player's cell at first but walked back to check and see if her eyes were playing tricks on her. The two gazed heavily at one another. "...It's you!" They both exclaimed, getting the attention of the guards.

"Why the heck did you leave me behind the other day, you jerk?! I had more questions and stuff for you!" The girl was obviously not happy as she remembered what the Player had done.

"You remember me?" He asked curiously.

"Of course I remember you. How could I not? I go to the bathroom for a minute and then you just leave, Mr.'Player' and such."

"To be fair, I didn't owe it to you to wait." He shrugged, further inspecting her while trying to dive deep within his memory to remember her name as she did his. "You're uh...Raincoat, right?"

Her narrowed eyes were complimented with a slanted mouth gesture. "Umbrella, you idiot." She
also began tapping her foot, unamused.

"Right. That was my second guess." He claimed...most likely lying.

As they were speaking the closest guard was scratching the side of his head, or...helmet, in confusion by their conversation but as he noticed the older woman was approaching he got back on guard and respectfully saluted her. She was too occupied wondering why the younger girl was conversing with a prisoner to even notice the guard.

"Umbrella, what are you doing?" The woman asked as she appeared before his cell. She was stunningly beautiful, with a figure that could almost compare to that of the voluptuous Valentine. She had amber eyes and scarlet back length hair with one large bang covering the right eye. She wore a rather tight black turtleneck sweater, though the bottom material was a bit loose, and an impressively small and tight black miniskirt, on her feet she wore low heeled shoes. Her defining physical trait were her amazing legs, her attire honestly didn't leave much to the imagination. She also had a cross necklace that hung just above her breasts.

Once the Player got eye of her his jaw dropped and he couldn't help but form a perverted smile shortly afterward. It was clear he was attracted to her but based on how he reacted to Cerebella and Valentine he'd most likely have the same reaction to any attractive woman he meets.

"Damn! That's a tight ass outfit! How are you breathing in that? Better yet...let me not ask questions because it's showing all the right features."

The woman faced him now that he had her attention, "What was that?" she asked in a stern voice.

"You're sexy." He wasted no time in answering her, "I want to do things to you." It couldn't get any more blunt than that...

Umbrella was too young to truly understand what he was talking about and it was probably for the best. She just ignored what he said and turned to the woman while pointing to him, "Parasoul, don't worry. This guy isn't an issue. I met him on the ship before arriving in the kingdom. Remember I told you about that guy I met?"

Parasoul was her name, she lowered her head down to Umbrella as she explained their connection, "Him? So you're saying this is-"

"Yep. The Player. Kind of a weird name, right?"

The Player crossed his arms and rolled his eyes, "Better that than naming me after an inanimate object. Your name is Umbrella yet you're wearing a raincoat. And it's warm as hell outside. What's your parents name? Rubber and Boots?"

"Nobody asked you!" Umbrella stomped her foot in a comedic fit.

Parasoul was intrigued by the Player and was surprised that he was even within her authority. She was staring at him long enough for the Player to realize.

"Hm? What? Like what you see?" He asked with a smug smirk, hoping she was checking him out, which she wasn't, she wasn't even paying his question no mind. She then directed her gaze to Umbrella.

"Are you sure about him?"

"Mhm. He might be stupid but he's not so bad once you get to know him."
"You barely know me." He interrupted.

"I have good judgment. I trust that." Umbrella stuck her tongue out to him. Despite his claims she was still in the innocent stage of her youth so it didn't really matter how long they knew each other, she saw him as a friend. "What are you even doing in prison?"

The Egret that was on standby took a single step forward with his head held high to the two girls though his attention was mainly aimed toward Parasoul. "He was seen assisting the Medici's in one of their illegal business ventures. We knew the Player's power couldn't be trusted in the wrong hands so we took him in before any trouble could arise."

"The Medici's? So you're a criminal?" Parasoul questioned.

"If you guys were following me since I got off the ship you should know that I was FORCED to carry out that mission. I didn't want to be involved with the mafia but the guy who kidnapped me said if I didn't co-operate he was going to shoot me. Naturally I went along with it."

His story wasn't too far-fetched, it was believable and Parasoul could see the Medici's threatening the Player to get his power, even though he was completely oblivious to this despite being told multiple times he has some form of gift to bestow others. Parasoul was interested in hearing more but discussing these important matters in prison wasn't ideal.

"Release him." She directed her order to the Egret standing before her.

"Sir?"

"This young man will be under my surveillance from here on. He could be of use to us, helping ensure the peace and stability of the kingdom."

"So you're gonna use me like the mafia except you're slapping 'peace' on the situation to make it seem like it's the right thing to do? Brilliant."

When he put it that way it made Parasoul feel a bit manipulative. "It's not like that. I apologize if it was starting to sound hypocritical. I suppose I should have asked your permission beforehand. Player, will you assist my army in ensuring peace for our kingdom? With the rise of the recent Skullgirl and the Medici crimes becoming more grisly...Canopy Kingdom is slowly descending deeper into chaos. We're always looking to recruit those willing to help protect the innocent. I can only imagine the horror the Medici's made you endure."

"They paid me a lot of money. It was pretty sweet."

Parasoul wasn't sure how to respond, he was pretty open with his reply. Based on that he probably wouldn't mind doing it again if it meant a healthy pay but she couldn't jump to any conclusions. "...Well, I'm sure you'd rather be doing legal work."

"I guess." He shrugged, carefree about the situation. "It's not like they made me kill anybody. It was a simple fetch quest."

"Well, you won't be working for free. We will happily pay for your services."

The sound of a cash register being cashed in chimed in the Player's head the moment she mentioned a pay. His frequent interest in money wasn't a result of greed, it was coming from the need to survive, to keep him and Filia above water until he could get his wish...THAT was the greedy part. "So...you need me to join your army in order to ensure the safety of the people?"
"That's the gist of it. I will personally see you through your training and conditioning, including martial arts and heavy weaponry."

As if the money wasn't enough motivation the image of Parasoul fitting into various tight outfits for training graced his thoughts. "I'll do it!" He agreed without hesitation. Parasoul, Umbrella and the Egret looked to him as he displayed his sudden enthusiasm. As he noticed their stares he cleared his throat. "Uh, y'know, wanting to keep the people safe and all that jazz."

His new answer made Parasoul smile, she was delighted to see how selfless he was/seemed. "Excellent. I knew you would make the right choice. Egret, if you would?"

"Right away, princess!"

He grabbed the skeleton key ring from around his belt and unlocked the Player's cell. Once opened he stepped out and eyed Parasoul from head to toe, even more impressed with her now that he was closer.

Umbrella held her chest out proudly and huffed. "You should be lucky I noticed you in your cell. If I didn't you would've been stuck in there for a long time. I believe a thank you is in order."

The Player wasn't paying Umbrella no mind. "Parasoul, right? Thanks for being sensible. Ever since I got here things have been crazy. In fact, I never got a real chance to rest or even bathe. I have a friend back at this hotel we're staying in and I told her I would be back once I was done doing that stuff for the Medici's." Umbrella noticed she was ignored and grabbed his shirt, tugging at him to get his attention but to no avail.

"Is that so?" Parasoul responded, "I'm sorry to hear that."

"Nah. It's cool. I'm gonna head back and tell her everything is ok…though now I'm gonna be working under the kingdom's princess so I'm not sure how she'll take that."

"Will working for the royal family be a problem? I don't want it to be any trouble for you."

"I don't think so. I'm sure she'll understand. Besides I'll be able to keep us afloat now since I'm getting paid."

Umbrella wasn't too keen on the conversation continuing while was being treated like the third wheel. She waited a few seconds before breaking out into a kiddy tantrum, "Hey! Stop ignoring me!"

"Oh, right. Sorry." Parasoul replied to Umbrella, "You wanted ice cream. Let's head back to the castle then. Player, would you like a ride to your destination?"

"Please and thank you." He accepted the offer without any debate.

With everything in order Parasoul, Umbrella and the Player made their way out of the prison and were on their way to Parasoul's car. Waiting for them was a black convertible, based on the Cadillac Ciel. The Player and Umbrella eyed one another as they continued walking toward the vehicle, a sudden spark of competitive fire lit beneath their feet resulting in the two running to the car. Parasoul was surprised by their actions but she snickers quietly to herself once she realized the two were racing to see who got to ride shotgun.

After a minor spirit across the lot the two managed to reach the car at the same time. Parasoul eventually caught up to the duo and got in the driver's seat, leaving the Player and Umbrella at a stalemate. There was only one way to determine a winner:
Rock…
Paper…
Scissor…
Shot!

Rock vs Paper was drawn

The Player grinned and threw his fist into the air victoriously, managing to beat Umbrella. The young princess was a bit of a sore loser, this was clearly seen by her pouting and fuss for a rematch. The Player paid her no heed and opened his door, sitting in the passenger seat with a smile. Parasoul reminded her sister it was all in good fun and since the Player was a guest in their kingdom letting him ride shotgun would've been a privilege given to him by the youngest heiress. Umbrella accepted her defeat and got in the backseat, though she was still mildly sulking about it.

Later on the trio drove through the kingdom's urban district allowing the Player to get a good look at the multicultural society of the kingdom. Canopy was home to millions of humans, Dagonians, Ferals, and the giant-sized Gigans. When the Player first arrived seeing so many creatures unlike himself was a bit overwhelming for him but as they continued on he understood this was normal and every race lived together as one diverse unit. Looking back on his actions now he realized how childish it was of him to assume anybody not human was some kind of monster.

The group make their way back to New Meridian and arrived at the hotel the Player and Filia were staying in. Parasoul and Umbrella were surprised he was staying in such a low budget place and could only stare as they pulled up. The Player unbuckled his seat belt and got out the car.

"Ok. This is me." He spoke up, "Thanks for the ride."

Parasoul turned and faced him as he closed the car door behind himself. "It's no problem. I'm happy I could be of assistance."

"What ever." Umbrella climbed over the passenger seat and plopped down beside her sister, "Shotgun!"

The Player and Parasoul cracked a smile at Umbrella but quickly turned their attention back to one another. "So, princess, about that training and stuff. When do I get started?"

"Above all else I want you to rest first. You mentioned before that you weren't able to really settle in and relax. There's no need to rush your training. We'll begin this upcoming week, is that ok?"

He nods in response. "That sounds great. I'll be ready."

"Perfect. I'll be here to pick you up first thing on Monday morning."

Umbrella began kicking her feet, getting antsy, "Come ooooon! We're supposed to be getting ice cream! Sis, I'll die if I don't get any!"

Parasoul rolled her eyes and sighed. "Enjoy your day, Player. I'll see you soon."

"You too." He stepped back from the car and watched as Parasoul pulled off, driving down the street and entering light traffic, knowing Umbrella she would've complained about that too.

Upstairs Filia was already up and about, starting the day, but Samson was still sleeping away. Filia
was dressed in her school uniform from before since she didn't have a change of clothes with her, she was in the kitchen attempting to make breakfast. On the stove were two pans on the bottom grills, the pan on the left had four strips of bacon cooking at a medium-high temperature of the electric stove, the other pan was melting away a single stick of butter for the eggs she was preparing to cook. She had a book titled 'Cooking for Scrubs' and was carefully going over the instructions to make sure she didn't burn anything.

In the process of stirring the egg yolk she had in a bowl the Player walked in to the smell of breakfast being made. Delighted to hear the door open Filia poured the yolk into the pan, dropped the bowl in the sink and made her way to the front where she seen the Player locking the door behind himself, "There you are!" the excitement in her tone was adorably apparent. "I've been waiting for you."

"Hey, hey, I'm back and- I smell something delicious?"

"Oh! Yeah! I thought you'd be hungry when you got back. I saw you weren't home when I woke up, I wanted to have it ready so we both could have a nice breakfast."

The Player placed his hand over his mouth in a joyful expression, almost as if he was about to cry from immense joy. He removed his hand to reveal a smile with his lips tucked in. "Aaaw, Filia…! You cooked for me? You magnificent woman!" He opened his arms and brought her in for a hug, Filia was surprised initially but smiled back and returned the hug. The embrace between them would only last for a second though…a second aroma hit the Player's nose but it wasn't pleasant and it was coming from Filia. The Player opened his eyes after the smell sunk in, he then backed away with a look of disgust. "Wait a minute…you smell like ass!"

A blush hit Filia's cheek as he made his statement, she hadn't realized it before but since she started her journey she hadn't had much time to bathe but he wasn't exactly serene and clean himself. "You could really use a shower too…" Filia replied with a similar look.

"I don't stink." He huffed before raising his arm to give himself a whiff but upon smelling himself he saw her point. "…Damn. Both of us could use some bath time. I wonder if I was smelling like this when I ran into Parasoul."

"Parasoul?" Filia asked.

"Yeah. After I got done helping Cerebella I was surrounded by these guys with guns. I'm guessing they're the Canopy Kingdom's version of the cops. They were called the 'Black Egrets' or something. Anyway, I got taken to prison and spent the night there. They took my goddamn money. I had enough to keep us above water for at least a few months. That was the biggest pay I had ever gotten. So earlier this morning I was introduced to this red head woman named Parasoul. She was sexy."

Filia placed a finger on her bottom lip and raised her head with a furrowed brow. "Where have I heard that name before? Hm. I can't remember but it sounds familiar."

"The amnesiac forgot, huh? I wouldn't have guessed." He sarcastically teased her. "I should also mention that I'm going to be working for the Black Egrets. Parasoul agreed to train me personally and pay me for my services. I start Monday or so."

"You sure have been keeping busy. The first day you arrived you helped me out, the second day you run into some gangsters and helped out Cerebella. Now you were sent to prison and somehow joined the…uh, Black Egrets, right? I'm surprised you haven't collapsed from exhaustion. Are you sure you'll still be able to help me? I would hate to be a bother if you're far too busy."

"No, it's fine. Besides I promised to help you and I'm sticking to that. I took the job to help keep food
in our mouths. We gotta survive too, don't we?"

Filia smiled at him, still unable to believe the kindness he's shown to her since they met. To answer his question she nods at him. "You're right. Maybe I should find a job too. That way I could help bring in the income."

"You think you can do that? I mean…wouldn't Samson be an issue? I doubt you'd be able to wear hats in doors forever and knowing how bitchy Samson can be he'll lash out at anyone. If that happens you'd be in a lot of trouble." If Samson was awake this would be the part where he and the Player get into an argument. "Don't worry about working, Filia. I'll handle it and we'll be ok."

"You're too nice for your own good." She chuckled, "Samson may think you're no good but I think you're amazing. I couldn't be more grateful to have a friend like you."

"I am pretty amazing, aren't I?" His ego began to show itself once again, though Filia didn't mind it at all, in a sense she found it funny. Suddenly black smoke got the Player's attention, the smell of something burning also filled the air. "Is something burning?"

Filia then noticed the black smoke and the smell of burning food only to realize that she forgot she was cooking, "OUR BREAKFAST!" she gasped and hurried back to the kitchen. "No, no, no, no, nooo!" She could be heard repeating herself in the background. The Player was about to follow her until a knock at the door caught his attention.

He wasn't expecting company but maybe it was somebody for Filia? He opened the door and to his surprise Cerebella was standing before him.

"Morning!" She greeted her friend in an upbeat tone.

"Cerebella? Hey. I wasn't expecting to see you. What's up?"

Cerebella noticed the black smoke thickening behind him and was a bit concerned. I was getting increasingly difficult not to stare as the smoke got blacker. "I was…just in the neighborhood and thought I'd pay you and Filia a visit. To see how you two were doing."

"Aww. That's nice of you. We're doing great, I just got in like five minutes ago and Filia made breakfast."

"She knows how to cook?"

"She's learning."

"I see…and how's that going?"

"…Um."

Filia came out with a plate of burnt bacon and eggs, coughing to the side as she managed to find her way out of the kitchen. "B-Breakfast is ready. Oh, Cerebella! Good morning."

"Morning, Filia." She waved with one hand while holding Vice-Versa in the other.

"If I knew you were stopping by I would've made more for everyone!" The Player and Cerebella examined the plate of food she presented to them. The two looked on in disinterest. Filia noticed their stares and realized herself everything was burnt beyond salvation. "Uh, I guess it's a little blackened, huh?"
"That food is straight up burnt, Filia." The Player's blunt reply made Filia lower her head, dark blue vertical lines of depression descended upon her for comical effect.

Cerebella chuckled softly and rubbed the side of her cheek with her index finger. "How about we go out to eat? I know a good place we can check out."

"Sounds good to me. "The Player didn't waste any time responding, "You're paying, right? I'm broke and don't ask how after I just got paid from Vitale. I'd rather not talk about it."

Filia cocked her mouth to the side and furrowed her brows at him. "Maybe you shouldn't take advantage of her kindness, Player. She doesn't have to do this for us."

"It's cool, Filia." Cerebella spoke up before the Player could respond, "I don't mind. Besides I'm never really short of cash considering how hard I work for my organization. If you guys are struggling with money I don't mind chipping in as long as I have it."

The Player placed his hands in pockets and looked over to Filia with a smile, "See? We're fine." the unsuspecting male soon found himself in a tight headlock provided by Cerebella. "Ow! What gives?" He shrieked as she locked his head with her arm with greater force.

"That doesn't mean you can take advantage of me. Understand?" She smirked while playfully roughing him up.

Seeing her friends interact so casually made Filia laugh. The Player tried fighting back against Cerebella's hold but she was stronger than he was and she didn't plan on making it easy for him but with enough struggling he was finally able to break himself free from Cerebella's grasp, though she practically loosened up completely feeling that she messed with him enough already.

After he got free the Player readjusted his shirt's collar and rotated his mildly sore neck. "You're such a tomboy, Cerebella. Anyway...Filia and I need to take a bath before we do anything. Filia, do you have a clean pair of clothes?"

"Uuuuh...No, this is all I have right now."

"That one uniform? That's it?" Cerebella asked in concern.

The Player slowly shifted his eyes over to Cerebella, checking her outfit. "What do you mean 'That's it'? You're wearing the same outfit you had on the other day.

"We can't have you going out in dirty clothes." The young performer continued speaking to Filia, completely ignoring the Player, "I'm assuming you don't have any clean underwear."

Filia didn't want to respond in front of a boy, it was already a little embarrassing with the two knowing she didn't have any clean garments. She muttered shyly under her breath but it was obvious to the Player what the answer was.

"I'll take that as a yes." He said, breaking into their conversation. "Show me your panties. I'll go out and buy you clean clothes and underwear."

"W-WHAT?" Filia's embarrassment was sent to new heights, her cheeks were a bright shade of red...all from a single comment. The Player stood there as if nothing was wrong.

"Show me your underwear. I thought I was being clear."

Cerebella began to laugh, wondering if the Player was being serious with his choice of words. "Are
you really asking her that?"

"How am I supposed to help her if I don't know what she wears?" He looked at Cerebella with his shoulders shrugged upward not understanding the girl's reaction to his sincerity. Despite thinking he was speaking with the best intentions his kindness came off as perverted, almost as if he had no experience being a gentleman.

Cerebella crossed her arms and shook her head. "You're an idiot." She was still giggling from his ignorance, "You don't even have the money to buy her anything but even if you did what were you going to do? Just walk into a woman's lingerie store and ask for some underwear?"

"Well...yeah. Isn't that what you guys do? I was gonna walk into the store and tell the staff 'I'm here on favor from a special friend. We were up all night getting dirty from a rough evening out together and now she needs."

"THAT SOUNDS SO PERVERTED!" Filia lashed out, preventing him from finishing his sentence.

"Filia, you're acting like that skirt doesn't show off more than it needs to. Every move you make a panty shot is following behind it. In fact...I'm gonna get you a dress. What kind of school policy allows their female students to wear such short skirts?"

"T-That is not true!" Filia protested.

"Oh yeah? Jump."

The sudden command came out of nowhere, confusing Cerebella and Filia. "Why do you want her to jump?" Cerebella asked.

"You'll see." He replied, now facing Filia. "Go on. Jump."

"Fine. I don't have anything to worry about." Filia agreed with her hands placed firmly on her hips, obviously showing confidence in the length of her skirt.

Doing as the Player requested Filia performed a quick jump. Going up everything was just fine but as she came down the skirt blew upward and flashed her underwear. Filia quickly grabbed onto the hemline and pulled it down to cover herself but if she used too much force the skirt would've slid right off of her hips, she was barely covering herself properly.

"Eep!" She yelped.

Cerebella crossed her arms and looked on now seeing the Player's point. "Well I'll be damned. That is too short."

"Yep." He nods his head.

"No! Don't encourage him! And don't smile, Player!"

"Oh come on. As if you honestly didn't realize that skirt was waaaaay too small for you. There's no way in hell you never felt the wind blow between your legs. You're not fooling anyone, Thor thighs. Right, Cerebella?"

The performer nearly cracked at his comment on Filia's thighs. She quickly placed her palm over her mouth to prevent herself from bursting out into laughter. Filia's cheeks lit up once more. She got so embarrassed that her entire face turned red. Her thighs, admittedly, were one of her defining features.
Filia was a plump girl, not particularly fat but certainly not skinny or slim, and was often conscious about her weight, though most of the weight she displayed wasn't completely her fault as she and Samson share a symbiotic relationship, so whatever he eats goes toward her body and since Filia was already a fan of eating the weight piles on rather easily. Whether Filia knows that Samson contributes to her weight gain is unknown but as they keep active with fighting she gets a fair share of exercise to keep herself balanced.

The Player began to let himself go with laughter, Filia's expression was priceless and seeing that Cerebella was trying her hardest not to laugh at his joke he couldn't help but burst into hysterics.

Filia wasn't impressed and tackled him onto the floor, where she proceeded to scuffle with him until she managed to put him in a reverse figure 4 leg headlock, he was now on his backside looking up to the ceiling, apparently she knew a few moves without the need of Samson, revealing that she was a capable fighter...unfortunately for the Player, who was flailing about against her hold. The Player's head was nestled into the softness of her thighs but he was being suffocated by her right legs vice grip.

Seeing this Cerebella couldn't keep herself from laughing any longer, the Player was tapping the floor in a submissive manner but Filia didn't make it easy for him. Cerebella held her sides and let out a wild laugh, she was actually impressed with Filia's technique as she specialized in grappling attacks.

"It was a joke, Filia! A joke!" He was barely able to form words from the strain on his throat. "Get it? Like, thunder thighs? Thor? God of thunder? It was a jo-" The squeeze around his neck tightened making his eyes widen, "AAAAACK! Too tight, too tight!" his voice was becoming more and more hoarse. "Cerebella! Heeeeeeelp!"

Cerebella had her back against the wall, still laughing uncontrollably. She whipped the tear out of her eye as the Player asked for her assistance. "Nope. You got yourself into that mess so you can get yourself out. You don't make fun of a girl's weight then go unpunished. Friend or not."

Filia's face transformed from her casual cute and innocent to a more devilish look, humorously, of course, as she didn't mean him any personal harm...she just wanted to teach the Player a lesson. Her eyes were heavily shadowed so that they appeared as nothing more than two white circles, her mouth was in a near permanent crescent grin while she applied pressure (similar to Peacock's iconic toothy smile).

"If you say sorry I may let you go." Filia's voice was almost demanding, clearly showing her dominance.

"Nnngh...apologize for joking? C'mon! Admit that it was funny!"

"Not as funny as me choking you with these thighs of thunder. Is it?"

The Player remained still for a moment, letting her words sink in. "...YOU ADMIT IT!"

"I was referencing your joke! Not admitting to my size!" Filia countered, applying a little more pressure.

"Aaaauugggh!" The Player shrieked out, "Ok, ok, ok! I'm sorry!"

"What was that?" She asked for clarification.

"Sorry! I said sorry, damn!" Filia expressed her delight with a fiendish chuckle and released the Player from her submissive hold. He wrapped his hand around his throat and rubbed the lingering
soreness on his neck. "…Sorry your thighs detonate with a 'boom' with each step you take!"

He was practically digging his own grave at this point, but who knows, the guy was probably enjoying himself to some degree. Once he made another shot at Filia's thighs he got up and ran into the living room.

"A GLUTTON FOR PUNISHMENT ARE WE?!!" Filia exclaimed, now chasing after him.

Cerebella watched as the Player ran around the room, jumping over furniture and crossing up Filia with random and erratic movements. "They're still going at it? Oh my goddess…these two are going to be the death of me." Cerebella said to herself under her breath with a look of happiness.

A few hours later, at the Renoir family's castle, Parasoul is seen reading through multiple books surrounding Canopy's history and mythology in the castle's extended library.

Parasoul sat at the table carefully reading over each page. "I've gone through most volumes here and there's still nothing about him." The young princess closed the final book and moved it to the side. She sighed heavily and glanced over to her left, there a single red book remaining: 'Nancy Renoir' was written on the front. Parasoul took the book in hand and gave a long stare, placing her index finger and thumb upon her chin. "What is it that you know, mother?"

The princess opened the book, the diary of the now deceased queen, and found the page she had bookmarked. There was a single page written with the following message: 'The dreams keep coming back, haunting me with glimpses of a future I tried so hard to prevent. I wished with all my heart that my beloved daughters wouldn't have to grow up in a world of war, hate and conflict but its only now that I realize how naïve I was. There isn't much time left for me…I've made my choice and with it I must face the consequences.'

Parasoul turned to the next page and saw another single page dedicated to the queen discussing her dreams.

'Each dream progressively gets worse. The more I'm plagued with these thoughts the more I realize how evil the Skull Heart is. What is the Skull Heart and who created it? The more I think about it the more I find myself desiring an answer but time won't allow for that.'

She turned to the next page.

'Tonight I had a dream of the savior, possibly my only solace before my departure. On that day shall he appear. One whom I only know as 'Player', he who has the power to bring out the light in those chosen by the Heart to embody darkness and corruption, the lives connected by the pain and suffering the Skull Heart bestows…the Threads of Fate will come to their conclusion and the pieces will all come together as long as he lives.'

"…This is the only reference I have of him. My mother saw him in a dream amongst the nightmares and wrote about him in her diary. I had no idea she was being tormented by these dreams. A result of becoming the Skullgirl, no doubt, but still-"

The door to the library opened, getting Parasoul's attention before she could finish her sentence. A Black Egret approached the table and saluted her. "Forgive the interruption, my princess."

"It's no trouble. What brings you here?"

"Lady Umbrella, ma'am. She's really getting antsy about her ice cream."

"Oh. Right, I forgot about that." She stood up from the chair and took the queen's diary in hand,
leaving the other books out on the table. "Would you mind putting these books back on the shelf? I'd do it myself but I've kept Umbrella waiting long enough."

"Not at all. Please, enjoy your time out with your sister. It's not often you two have much time together."

His words hit home more than the Egret knew. Parasoul felt bad that her job kept her away from Umbrella, having the youngest princess spend most of her time alone put a bit of guilt on Parasoul's shoulders, especially since Parasoul was the only family Umbrella had.

"...You're right. But I plan on fixing that." She responds to the Egret and saw herself out. At the castle's foyer Parasoul regrouped with Umbrella.

"Ready to go, Umbrella? I've got the car waiting."

Umbrella, who was waiting impatiently, stood up from the white luxury couches she was laying on and stomped her way over to Parasoul for making her wait for so long. "Geez, it's about time!" Despite clearly showing mild annoyance with waiting she couldn't help but make a delighted grin now that she was going to have time with her sister, seeing how happy Umbrella was made the oldest princess overjoyed despite not showing it due to her calm and cool demeanor. "Let's see now...I'm going to get strawberry, and Hungern will have..."

Just then two higher ranked members of the Black Egrets rushed into the castle, one male and a female, the two got the attention of the two princesses and stood respectfully, saluting them.

"Commander Parasoul!" The male, Adam, was the first to speak.

"Commander!" The female, Molly, followed up after running in after Adam.

"At ease, soldiers." Parasoul responded in a more calm tone compared to her subordinates, "What's going on?"

Molly stepped forward, calming herself down from before. "Your highness, we have confirmed intelligence that the new Skullgirl menace has surfaced in New Meridian!"

Parasoul's eye widened but this was news she was almost expecting, she didn't expect things to begin so suddenly and merely placed one hand on her hip as she displayed a more serious expression. "So...it begins." She then looked down to Umbrella with a look of disappointment, "Sorry, Umbrella. It looks like your ice cream will have to wait."

Umbrella was a little sad to hear their plans get shot down and looked down to her feet while the grip on her living weapon, Hungern, tightened.

"Molly, assemble the Black Egrets! Execute Operation SG-009 and make preparations to mobilize to New Meridian immediately!"

Despite her initial upset with Parasoul Umbrella flipped the situation in an attempt to have some form of time with her sister, now viewing the change in plan as a way to stay with her. "Finally," She perked up with a smile, "some action! I call shotgun!"

"Umbrella, stop it. This is serious. You know you can't come. It's just not safe."

"What!? I just want to see you and Krieg in action!"

Parasoul regretfully smacked her teeth and ignored Umbrella's wishes to come along. "...Adam,
make arrangements for Umbrella to get some ice cream, and keep her safe."

"Er, yes sir!" Adam replied. "Operation, er…Chocolate Dawn will commence post-haste, sir!"

Umbrella stomped her foot, annoyed at Parasoul, it was beginning to feel as if she was trying to avoid her. "I don't want ice cream anymore! I wanna go, too!"

Parasoul lowered herself down onto one knee, getting to eye level with her little sister, placing a hand on her shoulder with a reassuring gaze. "Umbrella…I promise I'll make it up to you one day, after I'm done with the Skullgirl. One day you'll understand."

Not impressed with her words a near emotional Umbrella swatted away the hand Parasoul placed on her shoulder and looked back at her with frustration in her eyes. "No! You always say that!"

"Don't be that way, our people need us more than ever! Do you know how important this is? The safety of millions is at risk!" Parasoul began to show signs of frustration as well, Umbrella's childish acts were making the oldest sibling feel she was being selfish.

"I don't care! I'm always locked up in this crummy castle with your stupid lieutenants. I hate you!"

Her heart nearly sank hearing her only sister use such powerful words. The strike to her heart turned to even more frustration as she balled up her fist and lightly grit her teeth. "Why you…" Parasoul managed to calm down, feeling there was a bigger risk at hand. She stood up and looked away, "I don't have time for this! We'll discuss this later."

Molly managed to gather up a squadron of Egrets while the sisters went back and forth with their argument. They stood in line and awaited orders from their commander, who now faced them with the mission in mind.

"Egrets, roll out! To New Meridian!"

"Sir, yes sir!" All the Egrets shouted in response.

Parasoul lead the charge out of the castle, now making her way out to search for Marie who had come out of hiding at last. With the castle empty Umbrella was left alone, as she always felt she was. Before she could even react to her sister leaving a sudden pain befell her body, she clutched her chest with her right hand. Adam had already left to fetch Umbrella some quick scoop ice cream from the kitchen.

"Nngh…my chest! Wait! Is that…mom?"

This painful phenomenon quickly subsided and the familiar warmth that Umbrella once knew surrounded her. She was able to sense the presence of her mother…which was odd considering her mother, Nancy, has died a long time ago. Umbrella was certain of what she was sensing. Unable to shake the feeling of her mom the young princess took off, leaving behind the castle shortly after Parasoul had already left.

Adam returned to the foyer. "Well there isn't any ice cream in the freezer so I guess we will have to go out for ourselves. Now, your highness…er, Umbrella? About that ice cream…where did you want to go?" He looked around and to his surprise there was no sight of Umbrella. "Huh. Now where did she run off to…?"

One of the castle's front doors was left open, Umbrella was out of the castle and on her way to the city.
About two hours later, in New Meridian, Filia, Cerebella and the Player were out and about. Filia was lucky enough to discover that she indeed had another hat to spare, after Samson ate the original when meeting the Player. Interestingly enough the Skullgirl was nowhere to be found, in fact the streets weren't even in a panic as if they were unaware the Skullgirl was even around, it was just like any other day.

The Player had his hand on the back of his neck, occasionally rotating it and getting the soreness out the best way he could. He was also carrying a bag of clothes for Filia that she and Cerebella picked out.

"My neck is still sore, goddamn…"

"You've only got yourself to blame." Cerebella replied before slapping his backside playfully.

"AH! Stop it! Everything is still sore, gimme a break."

Filia wasn't sure if she overdid it but she can be a real beast when she gets going, or more specifically when her weight comes into the picture. "Sorry. I'm not sure what came over me."

"I still can't believe you kicked his ass and I wasn't awake for that." That was Samson talking from underneath Filia's hat, his words were muffled due to it being placed over his entire body but the words were still somewhat audible. "You don't know how much that bites, kid!"

The Player slapped the back of Filia's head. "Who asked you?"

"Ow!" Filia revealed the hit had affected her as well. "He's still a part of me, you know…"

"Right. Sorry."

"You got one more time to hit me. I'm not afraid to come out and devour you in public."

"Bring it on." The Player challenged in a whispering tone, "I'll snatch your roadkill lookin' ass up real quick, Samson."

Samson was triggered, nearly pulling the hat off of Filia's head but luckily she was able to react fast enough to keep it down. "Listen here, you little shit!" Samson snarled from underneath.

"Samson, calm down!" Filia pleaded after nearly having her cover blown. The passing civilians even started giving the trio weird looks, even peaking over their shoulder while walking by. Filia gave their curious gazes an innocent smile as if nothing was wrong.

"He started it!" Samson continued to protest, making the hat move around. "And lighten up on the grip, I can't breathe!"

"O-Oh, sorry." She released the hat and adjusted it so that it was off of Samson's face to give him some breathing room.

Cerebella crossed her arms and twirled Vice-Versa around on her hand, intrigued they were able to keep up appearances. "You guys sure are a handful. If you're not careful you're really going to get in trouble. Both of your heads will be cut clean off if you're discovered."

"It'll be Samson's fault if it happens. He's the one always throwing a fit at the smallest of insults."

Samson groaned underneath the hat but kept his mouth shut to prevent any more attention being placed on them. "You're so childish, kid."
"Aha, referring to me?" The Player asked. "And stop calling us 'kid', man. We are old and responsible enough to be treated as adults. I am a man and you will treat me as such."

While walking down the sidewalk the group came across a sweets vendor stand. "Hey, look. A cotton candy stand." Filia was the one who pointed it out, as the others hadn't even paid it no mind.

"Oooh, oooh!" The Player grabbed Filia's hand and pointed to the menu above showing the various flavors of cotton candy, it was as if he was child trying to show his mother what he wanted, "Filia, I want that one!"

Samson heard the Player and huffed, giving a light smile as he found the irony a bit humorous. A few minutes later the three friends took a brief stroll through the nearby park, eating their fluffy sweets and admiring the beautiful scenery. There was a small pond nearby, the surrounding trees were pink in color and resembled cherry blossoms, the pink petals gracefully descended to the ground and surface of the pond. The group sat together on one of the wooden benches.

"Aaaaah. Now this is the life, ladies. Cotton candy, fresh air, friends and no serious plot development."

"The hell is he talking about?" Samson asked almost immediately.

"I tell ya, girls…" The Player continued with no attention paid toward the question, "It's the sweeter things in life that makes it all worth it, just like this cotton candy." He then took a bite out of his fluffy blue treat.

Filia took a bite shortly after he did and felt her mouth tingle from the sugary goodness. "It's really sweet and the best part is when it melts away in your mouth. Sooooo good!"

"You guys are making me hungry." Samson spoke up though surprisingly he was more quiet than usual. "Can it or share some."

"You can eat human food?" The Player asked.

"I can eat whatever I want. I threaten to eat you all the time so why wouldn't I be able to eat cotton candy?"

The Player shrugged before taking another bite. "I dunno. By the way…how does that work?"

"What do you mean?" Samson asked.

"When you eat does that go into Filia's head or something?"

"What? No. I'm my own living self. That's why when I open my mouth you don't see her brain or anything."

The Player was confused and couldn't see how that was possible. He scratched the back of his head with a puzzled look. "But you take up most of her head, how does-"

"Don't ask because I don't know. All you need to know is that I'm not connected to the inside of her head and nothing goes inside her skull when I eat."

It was a confusing mix and the Player couldn't grasp the concept of the their physical relationship, despite Samson saying they're two different souls. "Then how do you use the bathroom? Do you pee or defecate inside her head or does she handle that for both of you when she needs to relieve herself?"
"WHAT ARE THESE QUESTIONS?" Both Filia and Samson exclaimed with the embarrassment being on Filia's end.

The Player flinched at their reaction and backed into Cerebella who took the final bite out of her cotton candy stick, chuckling as the Player leaned against her with his hands held out to Filia. "I'm just curious!"

"You guys are nuts." Cerebella said while patting the back of the Player's head, prompting him to get off of her. Once he leaned back upright she stood up and stretched. "It's getting late, I should start heading back."

"You're leaving?" Filia asked.

"Yep. Sun's gonna be going down soon and I'm sure my boss wants me back before long. It was really great getting to spend time with you guys today."

"Want me to walk you back?" The Player asked while holding candy stick to the side, what he hadn't realized was Samson lifting up Filia’s hat with a perfect view of the cotton candy. He extended his mouth and took a large bite leaving only the stick behind. Once he ate the entirety of the fluffy candy he retreated under the hat.

Cerebella shook her head in response. "Nah, I'll be fine. Thanks though."

"I should be the one thanking you." Filia replied with a cute smile, "You brought me so many clothes and I'm really grateful to you."

The Player rolled his eyes and huffed. "Basically just got you more uniforms…all of which have the same little ass skirt." He held the stick up to his mouth and bit down only to find that his candy was gone, much to his surprise. "What the hell…?"

"Don't worry about it, I'm glad I was able to help. The clothes weren't even expensive, unlike the clothing stores I shop at."

"Filia and I are middle class citizens so we're not surrounded by glitz and glamour like you. You don't have to rub it in." The Player teased, tossing his stick over to the park's trash bin as if it were a basketball but his angling was off resulting in a miss. Filia did him the favor of picking it up and throwing it into the garbage which was directly to her left on the bench.

Cerebella placed her hands on her hips and leaned toward the Player. "I wasn't trying to rub it in, stupid. I was just saying that the clothes weren't expensive and it was really easy on my wallet."

"A nice way of saying we're poor." He nonchalantly whispered over to Filia.

Cerebella snarled lightly at him and stood up straight, crossing her arms. "Keep that up and I'll get Filia to lock your head in that choke hold again."

Filia cracked a smirk and flagged her hand at Cerebella. "You stop that. It wasn't that bad, right?" She asked while facing the Player. "Player?"

His response was nothing but silence...staring intensely into nothingness without even blinking. It was as if he was undergoing a traumatic war flashback.

"…"

The only thing going through his mind was various flashes of Filia's thighs and the sound of thunder
going off. Filia snapped her fingers in front of his face and finally, after the third snap, he came back to his senses.

"Huh? What?" He looked around in a panic before realizing it was all in his head. "Oh…it's just you guys."

"Are you feeling ok?" Filia asked, "You just kinda zoned out for a moment.

He shook his head, blinking sporadically afterward. "I did? I'm...fine."

"Well, whatever." Cerebella shrugged and waved at her friends. "I'll be seeing you guys later."

"Bye!" Filia waved back while the Player remained sitting in silence. "Guess she has a busy schedule to keep. What should we do now?"

"...Hm? O-Oh, I dunno. Its not that late in the day so I'm fine with staying out a bit more."

"That sounds great. What'd you have in mind?"

"Anywhere that doesn't involve shopping for clothes because I'm done with that for today. I'm still new here so I don't know what New Meridian has to offer in terms of entertainment. You want to check out a movie?"

"A movie?" Filia was originally going to propose the duo spend some time at one of her favorite book stores in town but she didn't want to offer an activity that sounded boring. "Yeah! Perfect! Not sure why I didn't think of that."

The Player stood up from the bench and stretched his arms out. "Sweet. Now all we have to do is find a movie theater so we can-" Suddenly he spotted a familiar figure among the crowd, it was a young girl wearing a yellow raincoat, hat and knee-high boots. The Player squinted his eyes to make sure he wasn't seeing things and to his dismay it was very real.

"Something wrong?" Filia asked, leaning a bit forward from the bench to get his attention.

"On second thought, maybe we should head home and drop these clothes off first."

"Huh?"

The Player grabbed Filia by the hand in an attempt to get her up. "Come on. Let's go, I bet the hotel is closer than the theater so we'll just stop there first and then make our way to the movies." He was acting strange and talking at a fast pace, looking off in the other direction as if trying to conceal his identity.

Filia was still sitting, trying to comprehend his odd behavior. "Wait, you're acting funny. Is everything okay?"

"Everything will be fine as long as we get away from here!" He pulled on her arm with a bit more force. Seeing how badly he wanted to go, Filia stood up and was ready to follow his lead but the moment she stood up and he took the first few steps-

"Player! Hey, Player! Is that you?" The voice of a young girl called out from behind them.

"Fuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu-" The Player threw his head back, on the verge of swearing out of annoyance. He released Filia's hand and lowered his head before he faced the girl who managed to spot him. "Ah...look at who we have here." His tone was dull, matching his expression.
"It is you." The girl pointed with a smile. "What a surprise."

Filia crossed one arm over, grabbing a hold of her forearm, while watching the two converse. "You know this girl?" She asked after they were done.

"Yeah." He answered with a sigh. "This is Raincoat."

The girl snarled at him and stomped her foot. "That's not my name!"

"Right. I meant Raingear."

"That's not my name either!"

The Player scratched the back of his head with one brow raised in confusion. "Poncho?"

She facepalmed. "You idiot...I'm Umbrella!"

"Oh, yeah. That was my second guess." The Player casually placed his hands into pockets, now looking back over to Filia. "This is Umbrella. I met her when I first came here."

"I see." Filia looked down to Umbrella with a smile. "Hi, my name is Filia. It's nice to meet you!"

Umbrella was over the Player's ignorance and found a level head when Filia properly addressed her. "Same here. You're friends with him?"

"Mhm. He's a really nice guy who's been really helpful and good to me since we met. We were just out shopping with a friend and decided to spend the rest of the day together."

"I see, I see. That sounds fun."

"What about you?" The Player asked. "Did you get your ice cream?"

"No. I don't care about that anymore."

"After nagging your sister to death? Pfft. She's better than me because I would've strangled you once we got home."

Filia gently tapped the side of his leg with her foot, trying to get him to be more polite to the younger girl. "Be nice." She whispered over to him.

"How can I possibly worry about ice cream at a time like this? My mom is back!"

Umbrella's statement came off as a bit confusing for Filia and the Player. Filia looked over to the Player, thinking he knew what she was talking about since he knew her, but he was just as lost as she was and shrugged to justify his confusion.

Filia lowered herself onto one knee so that she was at eye level with Umbrella. "What do you mean?"

"My mom. I haven't seen her in so long but she's finally back. I know she's back because I can feel her!"

"You...feel your mom?" Filia asked to which Umbrella nodded in response. "I don't think I understand."

A thought had just struck the Player. He remembered a crucial detail before he even arrived in
Canopy, back when he was reading a book that detailed the history of the kingdom:

'Seven years ago, the world was engulfed in conflict, in what became to be known as the Grand War. Queen Nancy Renoir found the Skull Heart and wished for peace, but found herself transformed into the most powerful Skullgirl to date as a result. In the end, the three nations had to stop their war to team up to defeat the former queen – in the end her wish was granted, as an uneasy peace formed following her demise.'

If Nancy was the monarch of Canopy then that would mean Parasoul and Umbrella were Renoir royalty. The Player wasn't sure how it slipped his mind but what was even stranger was that the book confirmed Nancy's death leading him to wonder how Umbrella was able to feel her mother when she's dead.

The Player took a single step forward and placed his hand on the back of his neck, looking as if he wasn't ready to reveal what he knew. "Umbrella. Your mom...uh, I'm not exactly sure how to tell you but, well, she's not here. She's gone. Like...she's in heaven. You understand?"

Filia almost couldn't believe him for saying something so dark to a little girl, shocked he could even deliver such news to Umbrella. "Player...!"

"W-What? I'm not lying."

Umbrella knew what she was feeling and believed in it far more than what others had to say. "She's here!" She remained determined and had a clear sternness in her voice.

"But-"

Before the Player could even argue Filia placed her hand over his mouth to prevent him from talking. She instead smiled at Umbrella, who she wasn't even aware was a princess. "You're such a brave girl. I can't help but admire your courage. Believing in what your heart feels no matter what. Would it be alright if we joined you?"

The Player muffled underneath Filia's palm but she refused to let him speak.

"You'd do that?"

Umbrella wasn't expecting help but had to consider it. More progress would've been made if others helped, and yet she didn't want to get anyone else involved, but because she knew the Player and the fact that Filia seemed to be a really nice person she couldn't see any reason to reject the offer.

"Well, it would certainly help me out a lot. Plus I'm not familiar with New Meridian so having help from city goers like you will really come in handy."

Ultimately this was what the Player was trying to avoid. He knew things would get complicated if he stuck around long enough for Umbrella to spot him. He sighed underneath Filia's hand and shook his head as the two girls had their chat.

Realizing he finally gave in Filia lowered her hand and looked back at him.

Noticing her grateful stare he rolled his eyes, trying to play it cool. "Fine." He pouted.

Filia giggled and faced Umbrella. "See? You can always count on your friends to lend a hand. Now which way are we headed?"

"That way." Umbrella pointed near the park's exit that lead to one of the city districts.
"Then let's get started. Lead the way."

Umbrella nods at Filia and headed in the direction she pointed out with Filia walking along with Umbrella, hand in hand. The Player remained behind, watching as the two set off but upon realizing he was falling behind Filia turned around and called his name, making him come along.

The trio went out and followed every direction Umbrella gave them and since they were on foot the journey proved to be a long one the more they carried on, going solely on what Umbrella was sensing. While the Player remained rather quiet throughout their walk Filia was constantly engaging in uplifting chat with Umbrella to keep her spirits high. The Player wasn't even sure what was making him so against the idea of continuing on the search, perhaps it was a means of making up for his lack of consideration for Umbrella's feelings? Or maybe it was just instinct to help someone in need. He couldn't find the answer and merely watched the girls ahead of him go back and forth with conversation.

Skipping ahead the group made their way back into town. While the Player had his focus on one of the nearby comic book stores Filia and Umbrella went on ahead, hiding away in a nearby alley once they realized he wasn't paying attention. After the Player was done window shopping he realized he lost the girls. He quickly surveyed his surroundings and began running in the direction he last saw them, once he got to the alleyway the two jumped out at him in an attempt to scare him, which seemed to have worked as he jolted from their reveal, stumbling back until he fell on his backside. The girls shared a laugh on a job well done.

They searched multiple routes around the city but still nothing, just a lingering force Umbrella had mistaken for her mom. Along the way the group took a small break at a local café which was famous for its outdoor patio providing a gorgeous riverside view. The trio enjoyed a few warm drinks and pastry treats while the cool breeze blew through their hair, except Filia who was still wearing her hat to keep Samson hidden, however she was able to sneak him a few sweets when nobody was looking. It was a delightful experience to help keep the group going.

Once their stomachs were full the citywide search continued. They got back to the heart of the city and asked around for the woman matching the description Umbrella detailed, or at least from what she remembered last time she saw her. Everyone they asked had the same answer, no one has ever seen such a woman. Filia went ahead to ask a few more people while the Player hung back with Umbrella, watching as she asked around only to see more people providing a simple shake of the head, much to Filia's growing fatigue.

Realizing they weren't making any progress despite the hours they spent searching Umbrella began to show signs of doubt and emotional anxiety, she grabbed a hold of the Player's hand for comfort. Feeling her touch the Player realized her hand was beginning to shake, he was able to sneak a gaze down to Umbrella and even he started to show signs of worry for the young princess.

Filia made her way back over to the group and greeted Umbrella with a smile, speaking to the two with a pep in her step, showing that she wasn't ready to call it quits. She pointed in the opposite direction and was now leading the way. Umbrella was still showing a bit of uncertainty but the Player placed his hand on her head and playfully ruffled the hat on her head, getting her to look up at him. He gave her a reassuring smile before providing a supportive pat to her back. He held hands with her in a secure lock, pointing his thumb in Filia's direction, gesturing that it was time for them to catch up. Umbrella eventually found her smile again and with renewed hope moved forward.

Though tired they marched on. Walking the city streets until the sun went down. They soon found themselves in the city square, Umbrella was leading while Filia and the Player were slowly trailing behind.
"Filia," The Player finally spoke now that Umbrella was out of hearing distance, "how long are we going to keep this up? I wasn't lying earlier. I know her mom isn't here. She was the-

She shook her head, preventing him from finishing his sentence. "I want her to be happy. I want that girl to have the satisfaction of knowing that even if we don't find what she's looking for she followed her heart to the end. I don't know why but I feel this girl is very important, like she's someone we have to protect." The Player remained quiet, looking over to Filia as she spoke before she finally looked up to him. "I want to inspire her to keep going, just as you've done for me. She at least deserves that much."

He wasn't sure how to react initially but he cracked a smile and shook his head. "You're so corny." He playfully teased her, "I guess we can try but I don't want her out too late. In fact I'm going to take her home so that her sister doesn't worry. Here, take your clothes back to hotel and I'll meet you back there."

"It's fine. I'm not tired, I can keep going with you guys."

"No, don't worry about it. Just go back and rest. You've been walking for hours and I want you to take it easy." He held up the shopping bag to Filia.

Filia placed her hands on her hips rebelliously. "No." She replied.

"What? Come on."

"I'm not letting you wander out alone. Remember what happened last time?"

"I got held up by some guy who works for the mafia, forced to do his dirty work and got arrested afterward. That was completely random and I doubt that'll ever happen again."

Filia remained unconvinced and simply squinted her eyes.

"What?"

She took the bag in one hand and held out her free hand up to him, extending her index finger. "I'm going to put these clothes in the hotel but I'm coming right back. Wait here. Am I clear?"

The Player wanted to decline but Filia was completely adamant and he was too tired for arguing. "Fine..." He reluctantly agreed with a sigh, "Just make it quick."

"Good boy!" She responds with a victorious grin. With that settled she ran off with the satisfaction of knowing he wasn't going to win the fight.

He watched Filia head off in the direction of their hotel and cocked his mouth to the side and crossed his arms. 'Pfft 'What happened last time'...stop babying me. You're not my mother. I mean – how the hell am I supposed to control what randomly happens to me? I don't need a chaperon. Whatever. Guess I better catch up to Umbrella so Filia doesn't get mad at me for losing her. What's there to even worry about? Nothing is going on around here."

Meanwhile, on a nearby rooftop...

"Parasoul," The voice of Molly came through on the walkie-talkie the redhead princess was carrying with her, "we have confirmed reports that the Skullgirl has been spotted near the River King Casino!"

One of the Egret soldiers scoping out the area with rifle had his sights on the target to ensure the info
was right. After a careful observation it appears the intel was right on the money.

"Sir! Target confirmed!" He alerted the princess who was standing beside him, waiting to give the order.

"Excellent work, men! Advance on the target immediately and aim for the Skull Heart!" She commanded.

"We don't have a clear visual on the Skull Heart. The target is blocked by...it's your sister. Princess Umbrella!

"What?!" Parasoul's eyes widened in disbelief. She wasted no time in taking the sniper rifle away from the soldier to gaze upon the sight for herself only to realize Umbrella was indeed in the way. "What is she doing here?" She tossed the rifle aside in a panic and held her hands up to her mouth. "UMBRELLA! That's the Skullgirl! Get away from her!" She yelled out to the top of her lungs in a desperate attempt to get her attention.

On the ground near the casino, Umbrella was able to hear Parasoul's voice and looked back to see Parasoul on the roof. The Player, who had finally caught up to Umbrella also heard the shouting and also noticed Parasoul.

"What the hell? Is that Parasoul?" He asked before even realizing the Skullgirl was in town.

Umbrella was overjoyed to know she had finally found what she had been searching for. She looked back to Marie for clarification and finally back to Parasoul. "No, sis! It's mom! She's back!" She yelled out back to her older sibling with a bright and tear filled smile.

"Eh? You found her?" The Player was shocked to hear the news, now realizing that Marie was standing before him however she wasn't paying any attention to her surroundings to even notice the company gathered around her, her focus was set on the casino before her. "What the hell? Marie is your mom?" He questioned in a haze of confusion.

Parasoul was horrified at the turn of events and was on the verge of jumping off the roof in order to reach her sister but she had to keep calm to have control over the situation. "What!? What are you talking about? That's not our mother!"

The Player was trying his best to understand what was going on but suddenly walking into the middle of the situation was chaos but in his defense Parasoul was just as confused as he was when it came to Umbrella claiming Marie was her mother. Before long a near deafening explosion detonated and shook the ground with a mighty quake, the resulting explosion was close and sent the Player flying back into a car. As he landed on the hood of the car the back of his head collided with the windshield making him lose consciousness.

The horrified sounds of screaming civilians filled the once quiet streets as a large building, the Medici Tower, threatened to give way and destroy a good portion of the city below. Shards of glass and rubble rained down upon the city streets as the innocent desperately fled for their lives. Realizing the urgency of this matter Marie took action, summoning up her power as the Skullgirl to conjure up the dead.

'Not...what I...' A voice spoke out from the darkness. Just then a light sparked amidst the abyss, giving light to the surrounding darkness. 'Save them...Don't let it fall!'

An unknown amount of time has passed and the Player managed to pick himself up. He found himself on a rooftop, looking down to the chaos surrounding him. His hearing was greatly impaired
due to the explosion from earlier, nothing but the sound of faint ringing plagued his ears. He looked
around, drowsily, to his left was the sight of an armless woman looking around the streets for an
unknown object but upon closer examination throughout the rubble she lowers herself down and is
seen with her severed arm, which she promptly puts back on the side it was missing from where it
basically reconnected and began working again, this woman was revealed to be Nadia Fortune so
naturally she can do that, the whole allusion that she lost a limb was less dramatic.

The Player took a gander over to the right and saw Parasoul calling out to him from a distance but
because his ears were still ringing her shouts were inaudible, with every word she spoke it was as if
everything was slowing down.

"Wow...I can't believe people still think making Saving Private Ryan parodies are original or funny." He
whispers to himself.

It is revealed that the Player has been retrieved from below and taken to the safety of the rooftops by
the Black Egrets as a command from Parasoul. Civilians were being evacuated as quickly as possible
by multiple soldiers whom handled the situation in a professional manner. The Players hearing was
finally back to normal and he was able to hear once again. The first thing he noticed upon he was
back up on his feet was the sight of Marie holding up the massive tower with her bare hands, as such
was the power of the Skullgirl, she was shown receiving additional help from the skeletal remains of
the undead. He stood in awe as she displayed her amazing abilities.

Above the player one of the caskets bursts open and revealed a young lady. She appeared to have
been apart of the undead summoning in some way yet she was much different from the others, she
was dressed in unique attire: a fishtail dress decorated with a skull plate on the chest area and an
overbust corset underneath, red/white stripped poet sleeves and finally, though not seen due to the
length of her dress, a pair of red/white waist high tights. The most interesting aspect of her was a
long white serpent like entity lodged within her head.

"AAAAAAH!" She shrieked while falling out of the sky.

The Player could hear the screams and looked up to the sky. "W-Whoa! What the heck is that?"
Seeing how fast she was falling out of the sky, and more so toward him, the Player finally decided to
run out of the way but just as he took action she landed directly on top of him, causing him to land
face down on the hard roof surface while she sat on top of him, almost breaking her fall.

"Ow..." She mumbled while rubbing her backside.

The Player could only moan out in agony while her weight from the landing crushed him. It was
going to be another long night...

Not dead just yet and I finally managed to sit down and finish the Parasoul chapter! ...Somewhat. I
say that because I'm not completely done just yet, I try to upload chapters based on the entire
scenario of the character's story from the game but the more I wrote for Parasoul the more I realized it
was getting too long and so I broke it up, I guess you can consider this part 1 of Parasoul's chapter
and the second should be done whenever I get myself together. I'm just glad I was finally able to get
something out. No fighting in this one but that'll be in the second half. Maybe I'll call it Parasoul part
2, if I do I'll just rename this chapter Parasoul part 1.
A hazy vision of calm reveals a time of peace, showing what appears to be an aristocratic party in progress though the location of this particular event is unknown. This scene briefly shines light on the more glamorous, sophisticated side of the Canopy Kingdom. Among the partygoers was a peculiar woman with pointed ears, she was seen carrying a small box as she made her way around the guests.

"You should open this one soon." The strange woman spoke in a familiar dual voice as she is then seen handing the box over to another woman. It appears the box was intended to be a gift.

The scene slowly fades to black before revealing another vision. This time a group of women are shown entering the party, heavily armed while the masked leader lead the charge with a glass of champagne in hand, her right forearm consisted of a large shotgun like weapon.

"Happy birthday, Selene." The armed woman took a sip of the champagne and pointed her gun out to an unknown target. "Time to blow out your candles."

Before she fired the gruesome sight of manslaughter is cut to black, only the sound of gunshots, screams and glass shattering were heard until finally it stopped...

It isn't long before we see the woman holding a defenseless and horrified girl at gunpoint, raising her head by grasping one of her pigtails, the gun's barrel aimed directly at the crying youths head.

"Don't forget to make a wish!"

The woman's last act of cruelty is cut, red, white and black flashed as the sound of the gun is fired. It goes silent for a brief moment.

"Please...give me back my family." The voice of a new woman pleaded from the darkness. "Roberto...Squigly...save them all!"

Among the darkness a quick vision of the Skull Heart flashes before showing an army of undead and the sight of a Skullgirl much older than Marie. Among the undead army was a man with a hole in his shoulder, he was still alive so he wasn't zombie, or at least no yet.

"Don't let anyone touch her, you understand...? Stop anybody who gets close – even me!" He spoke on his dying breath as a long trail of blood lead from his shoulder and away from the chaos.

Darkness covers everything once more.

'Not...what I...' A voice spoke out from the darkness. Just then a light sparked amidst the abyss, giving light to the surrounding darkness. 'Save them...Don't let it fall!'

Just then, from the light, a serpentine creature drenched in blood devours the vision, once again having darkness be only source of sight.

"Squigly!" A masculine voice called out.

The voice instantly caused the awakening of a young woman, she opened her only visible eye. "Mmf...?" She replied with a hint of drowsiness in her voice. A long white serpentine creature...
watched as she awakened. Before she could even pay it any heed the coffin she was put to rest in broke open, she then found herself falling out of the sky.

"AAAAAAH!" She cried out while plummeting out of the sky, landing on her rear only to have her fall cushioned by a male figure. "Ow..." She moaned softly while rubbing her backside.

"Thank goodness...you have awoken." The serpentine creature in her head sighed in relief while looking at her.

The girl wiped her eyes with her long red and white sleeve and faced the creature. "Le...viathan...?" She questioned, now revealing the creatures name, "You really did stay with me." A smile formed on her face, though interesting enough her mouth was stitched shut. She was talking via telepathy.

"Naturally." He replied with a similar expression. "Though the heart of our conflict has lingered as well."

The duo then turned their attention to the elephant in the room. Before them was the current Skullgirl, Marie and her undead army. She was holding up the upper half of Medici Tower which was proving to a challenge due to her size, luckily she was beginning to receive help from her skeletal army.

"It was her voice that called me back! Another Skullgirl has been unleashed on New Meridian..."

"She appears to have stopped the building from crashing into the streets below." Leviathan commented on the sight, "Rather curious behavior for a Skullgirl – Carnage would only swell the ranks of her undead army."

The girl and Leviathan were still unaware that they landed on a poor soul once they were released. The Player served as their cushion and groaned out slowly as he laid face down on the buildings roof. Hearing him the girl looked down and finally noticed him. Surprised by this she quickly got up, now looking down to him.

"Oh dear! I think we've landed on this poor boy..."

The Player felt the weight lift off of him, he proceeded to lift himself up, standing up on his two feet while tending to his aching back. "Goddamn...what the hell was that?"

"Apologies." Leviathan was surprised to see that he was able to stand considering how hard they landed.

The girl reached out to him and dusted off his shirt and pants using her sleeve, trying her best to help out. "Y-Yes, our sincerest apologies. We couldn't have anticipated such a sudden awakening. Are you feeling all right?"

"No, no. It's okay, it's just...pain." The Player answered while arching himself out with his hands on his back. The sound of his back cracking shortly followed his reply. "Wait. Why are you purple? And what's that snake thing in your head?"

She was initially rather confused by his sudden questions, he went from one thing to the next in just a matter of seconds. "I'm not sure what you mean by the purple question but as for my head, this is-"

It was now just occurring to the Player that the girl talking without the use of her mouth. Whenever she spoke her voice seemed to emit a minor echo. This was a first for him and he took a step back from the realization. "Whoa! The way you talk! That is...that is...that is so cool!"
"U-Um, well...flattery will get you everywhere, I suppose." The girl couldn't help but smile at his reaction but it came from a moment uncertainty as she didn't know how to respond to him. He was actually coming off as weird to her.

"It's like you're using telepathy or something. Like legendary Pokémon in the movies."

Leviathan blinked twice with adorable circular yellow eyes. "Poké- What?" He questioned.

As the Player was on the verge of explaining one of the Black Egrets noticed the two a few roofs over. "Commander Parasoul, one of the Skullgirl's minions has broken formation!"

Parasoul's eye had fallen onto the 'minion' the Egret pointed out, she was shocked to see the Player so close to her. "Egrets, do not engage – repeat, do not engage the minions supporting the wreckage! Help evacuate the civilians! As for the stray unit..."

The princess was able to make her way from the rooftop over thanks to the gap only being a narrow one. She ran up to the Player and placed her hand in front of him, backing him away from the girl to assume a defensive posture.

"Huh? Oh, hey! Parasoul."

"Stay back, Player. She's one of the undead servants belonging to the Skullgirl."

He was a bit puzzled by her accusation as the girl before him appeared nothing like any of the undead that was helping Marie, and the inclusion of Leviathan further supported this.

"She is?" He asked while sounding a bit doubtful.

"Oh. She means us, doesn't she?" The girl asked, showing she was just as surprised as the Player.

The Player placed his hand on Parasoul's shoulder, attempting to get her attention. "Are you sure? She doesn't seem like she's-"

"Lorenzo...Medici!"

Seeing the actions of Marie the young girl pointed to the source of the Skullgirls cry. "Behind you! The Skullgirl is making her move!"

In a panic Parasoul turned to the chaos where she witnessed Marie directing her rage to a fleeing airship in the distance. Over the course of time she was able to create two large hands of pure Theonite energy which helped take the immense weight off her shoulders from holding up half of the tower on her own strength.

"Don't you dare turn your back on me..." Marie's anger was growing exponentially at the sight, if it wasn't known before this sight definitely proves the youths immense hatred for the Medici's. "Or this empire you built on your victims graves...! I...WILL...DESTROY YOU!"

Her thunderous roar could be heard throughout the city. The Player could feel the pain in her voice and since he was able to sit down and chat with her on a personal level, on multiple occasions, seeing her in a state of blind fury was rather scary.

Using her power Marie was able to throw the tower an impressive distance, aiming it for the ship and away from the city. The tower was able to strike the airship but to a lesser extent than Marie had hoped, only destroying a large chunk of the engine.
The tower fell into the nearby sea, resulting in a gargantuan splash that would go on to soak a good portion of New Meridian, while the Medici ship spiraled out of control to an unknown location much to Marie's dismay. All the power she used left her exhausted, she was forced to watch them escape death.

"The Medici...shall not escape..." Her voice was very low, she broke out in a sweat while her eyes were barely able to stay open. Before long she fainted, plummeting out of the sky and down to the ground below. Seeing the falling Skullgirl Umbrella, who was still on the scene, took action, running to the spot where she saw Marie falling.

Parasoul grabbed her walkie-talkie, wasting no time in checking with the Egrets seeing to the civilians safety. "Molly, status report!"

"Most of the debris hit the water. Some buildings were damaged, but I'd say we got lucky there!"

The Player shook his head at the destruction. The more ruin he saw the more he realized he couldn't stand to see so many suffer and if that wasn't bad enough Cerebella left earlier to return to the Medici's, seeing how hellbent Marie was on killing those onboard the airship there was no telling what happened to Cerebella, assuming she was caught in the action, not knowing if she was safe was the scary part.

"Sir! That strange minion is gone!" Adam, who had earlier arrived on the scene, reported in, most likely when the Player was unconscious.

Parasoul, and the Player who had overheard, quickly looked in the direction the girl was last seen and as Adam mentioned she disappeared.

"The Skullgirl is the primary threat. We can't waste time on a rogue minion, no matter how unusual its behavior." After discussing the matter with Adam Parasoul held the walkie talkie to her ear. "Egrets, check for citizens that need emergency aid. After that, we're following that airship."

Nearby the nurse themed ninja, Valentine, sat upon a neighboring rooftop, though just a bit taller than the one Parasoul, the Player and Adam were stationed. "...Very touching, indeed." She spoke down to them, now making her presence known to them. "Who knew our steely princess had a soft spot?"

"NNB?!" The Player shrieked loudly, now getting behind Parasoul for protection.

Parasoul looked over her shoulder curiously. "NNB?"

"Ninja Nurse Boobs!" He answered.

Valentine rolled her eyes and shook her head at him. "Charming as ever. But, with all of that aside...I have to thank you, Player."

"Thank me?"

"Of course. You're the one who helped the girl down the path we mapped out for her. Thanks to you everything is going according to plan."

Parasoul was already aware of who she was talking about despite playing the pronoun game. She grit her teeth and pointed a demanding finger at Valentine. "Leave her out of this!"

"Normally I'd comply, but this girl seems...special." Valentine clarified, now crossing one leg over the other. "She appears to share a powerful bond with the Skullgirl, and that warrants further study.
Don't worry, though, the experiments should be...relatively painless. Despite her youth Marie won't last very long so it's time we start moving down the list for new candidates."

The princess's eyes widen at Valentine's claim and ran over to the edge of the roof to oversee the city, frantically looking for her little sister but the streets were empty with no sight of Umbrella. The realization of Umbrella leaving and having no idea where she could've gone put a great weight of emotion upon Parasoul's heart, making her feel helpless, the once fearless leader had finally shown signs emotional vulnerability. She was already aware of the destructive force the Skullgirl was capable of, and not just from the experience with Marie but from her very own mother as well. The thought of losing Umbrella terrified her.

"No!" Parasoul yelled out in horror to Valentine, "I said leave her out of this! She's just a child! How could you even think of allowing her to become a Skullgirl?!"

Valentine remained unfazed by Parasoul's words, displaying her lack of care with a silent and taunting smile. Seeing this turned Parasoul's horror into anger, she was beginning to completely lose her cool.

"That's an interesting look you've got, princess. Do you hate me? If it turns out your sister isn't a worthy successor to Marie then you can wish her back and take her place."

Parasoul furiously grit her teeth, the ferociousness on her face demonstrated how on edge she was. "I'LL KILL YOU!" She exclaimed in a near blinded state of rage but before she was able to make any rash decisions she felt a hand placed upon her shoulder. Parasoul looked over to her right she saw the Player.

"She's trying to manipulate you, Parasoul. Don't lose your cool. I can't risk you doing anything reckless because if something happened to you we won't have anybody to look after the kingdom."

The Player intervening was for the best and Parasoul knew it and while she was still very frustrated and scared his words concerning the well-being of Canopy managed to calm her anger but only by a small margin. All she could think about was her sister. "You want me to be calm? But, Umbrella is-!"

"She'll be fine." He assured, now getting the attention of Valentine. "I know exactly where she's headed and I'll be able to stop her."

Parasoul, now shocked, faced him unable to believe her ears. "Y-You do?!!"

"Yeah, but we're running on critical time so I can't explain right now. Leave it to me, I'll bring her back."

Valentine was aware of the truth the Player spoke as he managed to find their hideout on multiple occasions. Knowing this was most likely going to be trouble she had only one option: kill him. While he was distracted she withdrew a scalpel and with a swift swing the blade was aimed directly at his head.

Parasoul caught eye of Valentine's assassination attempt and easily blocked the scalpel with Krieg by giving a diagonal slash, the metal clink of the scalpel hitting the concrete surface got the Player's attention.

"Adam, back me up." The calm and collected tone in her voice marked the return of the firm leader of Canopy.

"Sir?"
"We're going to buy the Player some time. We can't let her out of our sight otherwise she'll try and stop him. He's the only one who knows where their hideout is so I'm trusting it to him."

The recomposed Parasoul made the Player chuckle low enough to basically make it inaudible. With a smile he pats her back. "Thanks for the save. I'll be back soon."

Now that his final words were given the Player made his way across the narrow rooftops, making a run to the apartment building with the fire escape which would've gotten him down to the ground safely.

Valentine jumped down to the building the trio were positioned and charged forward, attempting to pursue the Player. "Don't even try!" She called out to him.

Before she could make any progress Parasoul and Adam stood in her way, making Valentine come to a halt.

"Your fight is with me." Said Parasoul.

The two girls engaged in a long stare down, the atmosphere around them grew tense which sent shivers down Adam's spine. The race to prevent the rebirth of a new Skullgirl was on.

Around the same time Filia was making her way back to the downtown area of New Meridian as fast as she could, it was the location of all the chaos that was going on and since the streets were empty it was safe for Samson to free. Filia was running as quickly as she could, looking around at the debris that surrounded her. The farther she traveled the more destruction lie in wait.

"Oh my goodness...what could've done this?" She asked in worry.

"Hell if I know. Whoever did it must've really been pissed." Samson replied.

"The Player and Umbrella were still in town too. I pray nothing bad happened to them..."

Even though he didn't want to admit it Samson was also curious to know the well-being of the Player, they may have bantered nonstop in the past but his relationship with Filia and knowing how close they were made him hope for the best.

"I'm sure they're doing just fine, Filia. The boy may be annoying but I have a gut feeling he's too stubborn to die. Plus he has to keep his promise, helping us get the Skull Heart. Until then he can't die, or at least he better not, so let's not jump to any conclusions just yet."

Filia remained quiet, trying to calm her nerves with positive thinking. After having a moment to think she settled her thoughts and nods. "You're right, I need to have faith in my friends. I'm sure they're fine but even so I want to find them as quickly as possible."

Unbeknownst to Filia one of the damaged buildings just ahead of her was in a critical state and on the verge of collapsing. As she approached the building a large chunk of its side gave way and plummeted down to the ground below.

Seeing the impending danger Samson immediately took action. "WATCH OUT, FILIA!" He yelled out to get her attention but by then it would've been too late, he had to think even faster. He was able to transform his tendrils into two large wings which he used to blow Filia back a considerable distance. She clumsily fell back onto her rear only to witness the side of the building crashing into the street. "Whoa! That was a close one..." Samson sighed heavily in relief.

"AH! W-What the-?!" Filia's legs were practically shaking from the sudden life threatening she
narrowly avoided thanks to Samson. While sitting she took a look into the sky to see where the huge hunk of brick came from. "New Meridian is in worse shape than I thought. I guess it isn't safe to be wandering the streets. Thank you for saving my life, Samson..."

Samson regrew his natural tendrils and wiped the nonexistent sweat from his forehead. "Don't mention it. It's my life too."

Filia got up from the ground and brushed her skirt off. "It doesn't look like we can go this way, not with that in our way. Its probably for the best. We may be safer if we travel through Little Innsmouth."

"Yeah. Good idea." Samson agreed, seeing that most of the street was now destroyed with this huge obstacle now in their way.

In favor of a safer route Filia turned around and made her way for the Dagonian residential district, Little Innsmouth. Being that it was so late in the night the tide had already came in and sank the lowest level of the area which meant Filia had to stick to higher ground, coming from the eastern entrance.

Over on the western side of the area the strange blue haired youth and Leviathan were making their way toward the heart of Little Innsmouth.

"I don't even recognize New Meridian anymore. How long was I asleep?" She asked while looking over her shoulder at the way she came.

"That I do not know -" Leviathan answered, "but I know that it still reeks of the Medici's." Just then he caught sight of Filia who had stopped for a breather nearby after running all the way from their hotel to her current detour route. "Excuse me, miss, but what year is it?"

The question struck Samson as an odd one. He furrowed a brow, and crossed his tendril like arms. "Year?" He asked aloud not even recognizing the voice whom asked. "What rock did you crawl out from?"

Unlike Samson Leviathan was already well aware of who the voice belonged to and was rather surprised to see him. "...Samson."

Samson's curiosity lead his eyes to meet with Leviathans, he shared the same reaction which soon turned to an amused smirk. "Leviathan – surprised you aren't dead yet." He then noticed the girl and her unique state of being, "...Though I need to ask a coroner to be sure."

"Are you two friends?" Filia asked with a smile when seeing Samson was familiar with their new company. "Nice to meet you! My name is Filia!" She seemed all too willing to make her acquaintance.

"Sienna Contiello – but, please, call me Squigly." The girl happily introduced herself, revealing the name Leviathan shouted earlier belonged to her. "The pleasure is all mine. The city's changed so much while I was gone...tell me – do you live around here?"

The question made Filia cross her arms while looking a bit lost. "No...at least, I don't think so. I lost my memory, so Samson is helping me look for the Skull Heart to wish it back."

Squigly and Leviathan were taken aback by this information and looked on in disbelief, Samson however was more shocked that she would openly tell them making him facepalm. "The Skull Heart?" Squigly asked for clarification.
"...Filia! You gotta learn to shut your yap." Samson was obviously displeased with Filia for revealing such important information.

"What is the meaning of this, Samson?" Leviathan was now more than engaged with the conversation.

"Things got complicated. It's none of your business – never was."

Not wasting time in trying to get information out of Samson Leviathan turned to the only one he knew would be reasonable. "Miss Filia, do you have memories from before your head was occupied by this follicular vagabond?"

"Huh? What do you mean-"

"Stay out of this, worm!" Samson interrupted their conversation, preventing Filia from engaging any farther.

Leviathan's annoyance with Samson rose upon seeing how shady he was acting toward the young amnesiac. "Does she seek the Skull Heart, or have you pushed her toward it? I won't idly watch you bring doom to another host."

"Speaking of hosts, get a good look at his, kid." Samson replied, revealing that Leviathan was indeed a parasite. "I'd say she looks like she ditched her own funeral, but she's not dressed nice enough for it!"

The offended Squigly placed her hand over her chest with an unamused glare. "I beg your pardon!"

"You don't want to make friends with the undead, kid. Can't trust 'em when there's a Skullgirl pulling their strings." when there's a Skullgirl

Despite Samson saying this to cover his tracks he actually raised a good point, though the naïve Filia wouldn't know anything about it she merely took his word seeing as how Samson was more knowledgeable than she was when it came to things like this.

"And they seemed so nice, too." Filia regretfully replied.

"You selfish fool, Samson!" Leviathan snarled. "All these centuries – yet you've learned nothing. My lady, I humbly beg your assistance in this intervention."

"Of course." Squigly agreed. "My apologies in advance, Filia. For what its worth, we will aim for the boor infesting you."

"That's still hitting me in the head!" Filia adorably argued.

Now through with words the two parasitic hosts take their positions, ready to exchange fists. Samson was the first to make a move sprouting large wings in preparation to take flight, Filia crouched low and gave them a propelling start allowing Samson to take care of the rest, the two flew toward Squigly and Leviathan at speeds that would was too fast to react to. Filia was able to strike Squigly in the gut with Gregor Samson, landing the first hit. They soared through the air aiming to smash the more sophisticated duo into the nearby building at the end of the boardwalk however Squigly was able to adapt and acted accordingly by wrapping her arm around Filia's neck in a minor chokehold. Just before Filia and Samson could smash them into the building Squigly leaps upward so that her feet crashes into the building. The resulting impact created a large circular dent on the house.

"You've gone too far, Samson!" Leviathan aggressively spoke to his adversary who only grit his
teeth in response.

Squigly's hold around Filia's neck tightened to ensure she a good enough grip to perform her counterattack. Squigly pushed off of the wall and performed a retaliating roll over Filia's backside, successfully landing on the ground and hurling Filia back with the momentum she gained, sending her opponent back an impressive distance. Filia slides across the wooden planks and eventually comes to a stop. Filia, now on her hands and knees, wraps one hand around her neck, coughing lightly from the force put around her neck leading up to the throw.

"Filia, you alright?"

"Ugh, y-yeah. I just wasn't expecting her to do that..."

"Good. I don't think this'll be easy but let's give 'em hell!"

Filia got back up to her feet and charged at Squigly who took her fighting stance, patiently waiting for the next attack. Filia rushes in and performs a swift high left kick which Squigly easily dodges by ducking underneath Filia's leg, seeing that she missed Filia uses her momentum to throw out a right-handed spinning backhand punch which was blocked by Squigly throwing up right arm before it could make impact. Filia continuously tries outperforming her opponent with punches and kicks but at each turn her best attempts were blocked and parried with sophisticated poise.

Filia uses her dominant right hand to throw a straight punch only to have her fist grabbed after Squigly steps to the side one last time before beginning her assault. With Filia's hand in her grasp Squigly strikes Filia in the face with a left sucker punch, now releasing her hand she comes back with a right jab into her gut which had enough force to warrant Filia spitting up an excessive amount of saliva. While Filia is slumped over on Squigly's fist Samson acts and lands a lands a jab across Squigly's face which causes her to stumble back away from the duo.

"Get up, kid!" Samson called out to Filia who was still feeling the impact from Squigly's punch.

Abiding by Samson's request Filia picks herself up and makes another rush for Squigly, this time using a more coordinated approach with her parasite as Samson contributes with a few attacks himself but just like before Squigly is able to avoid them however the additional pressure of fighting two opponents had its drawbacks as they became more relentless with each second. Eventually Samson grows legs, taking the frontal appearance of a horse, and launches Filia forward with a double kick powerful enough to send Squigly back only a few meters as she managed to successfully block it, the latter retaliates driving both of her thumbs into Filia's temples, before she could recover from the kick. She squeezes her thumbs in pretty aggressively and thus made Filia back away with her hands placed on the sides where Squigly struck.

Squigly doesn't let up and uses this defenseless state to unleash a barrage of punches and Lich Slaps to Filia's body which she was powerless to stop, only cradling the area that was last attacked, Squigly pulls both arms back and shoves her now open palms into Filia's chest area which blows her back.

"OUCH! You don't have to try so hard!" Filia cried out as she came to a screeching halt, there was a stinging sensation surging through her torso that made her toss and turn on the wooden floor.

Squigly casually walks over to Filia while carefully keeping an eye on her in case of any sudden movement. "I'm being nice by taking this as lightly as I can. You seem like a really nice girl but I can't allow you to get your hands on the Skull Heart. No good will come out of it."

"Quit talking to us like you're hot shit!" Samson exclaimed.
Acting on impulse Samson grew arms and legs, taking his bipedal form, he jumped up from the floor and went on to attack Squigly, leaving Filia to dangle and drag about behind him, unfortunately for him she was already anticipating a surprise attack.

Samson threw right hook which Squigly easily dodged by leaning back, Leviathan counters by upercutting Samson with his tail, followed by a slap to the face from Squigly. Samson becomes increasingly more agitated by his lack of success and throws out more predictable swings, his fighting style appeared to be an unorthodox style of boxing, however his attempts only resulted in more exploitable punishes.

Squigly made one of his wild swings the last as she blocks the punch and shoves her fist into his stomach. Squigly went on to perform a quick 360 degree spin to have Leviathan swing his tail across Samson's face, making him stumble back until he hit a support beam for one of the higher boardwalks.

Meanwhile, over on the northeastern side of Little Innsmouth, by the trolley rail line, the Player arrives. He stopped to catch his breath, using his brief moment of rest to look around, trying his best to find the quickest route to the Meridian streets. While on his way back to the hotel he ran into the same road block Filia encountered but from the other side of the city, he also found it more convenient to make his way through Little Innsmouth.

"Ah...goddamn it, what side am I on? And where's the way back to the main road? This place is like a maze and I don't have time to waste." In the distance he was able to see two girls fighting near the Yu-Wan restaurant. "Hm? What's going on over there? Wait...is that...Filia? And that's the girl who could talk with telepathy. Why are they- Ugh, it's not important now. Filia! FILIA! Hey! Over here! No good. She can't hear me. I need to get over there." He looks over to his right and sees a path leading to the side which would've taken him around to their side.

Back in the fight Squigly and Leviathan continued their dominating performance over Filia and Samson, with Samson still being the one in physical control over Filia. Squigly heel kicks Samson in the chest, forcibly backing him and Filia into a corner where she then unleashed a flurry of kicks into the parasites torso, ending her assault with a high kick into his chin and the finisher by slamming the back of her heel into face which ended up bringing him down to the ground. Samson retracts back to his regular form.

Filia places her hand on the back of her head, rubbing the sore spot Squigly left behind. She picks herself up but collapses to the ground shortly afterward, unable to overcome the aching pain. "Oof! If that was you being polite, I'd hate to fight you when you're mad!"

"Grr...learned a few new tricks, you old worm?" Samson asked in a battered tone.

Leviathan held his head high, pleased that they were able to subdue the duo, or at least for now in an attempt to talk some sense into them. "Forgive us, but far worse will befall you if you pursue the Skull Heart. I speak from experience when I say that its consequences cannot be shaken off...surely you know what's happening to this city."

The destruction of a good portion of New Meridian spoke for itself and there was no denying the evidence of the Skullgirl becoming increasingly more powerful and heinous toward the Medicis, the latter of which was the cause of downtown Meridians destruction in the first place.

Samson sighed heavily, knowing Leviathan was right. "I hate to say it, but he's got a point. It's not too late to back out, kid. What do you say?"

"...No." Filia gave her answer after giving it some thought much to Squigly and Leviathan's chargin.
"You can't even remember the life you're risking!" Squigly protested.

"I think...someone I knew got in a mess. And I'm pretty sure it's my fault. I can't walk away from that just because I don't remember what I did. Samson, you said you'd support me – no matter what choice I made!"

Samson huffed, now showing a pleased smirk in her desire to continue the search for the Skull Heart. "Hah! Looks like we can't call it quits just yet!"

"Arrogant fool! Your meddling will end only in tragedy!" Leviathan retorted.

The sound of footsteps running along the wooden platforms could be heard from behind Squigly as the Player approaches in a hurry. "Filia!" He called out, instantly getting the groups attention.

"Sonofabitch...you're alive." Samson groaned.

The Player overheard Samson and wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I would make a smart remark but seeing you get your ass kicked was enough of a treat."

Samson raised his hand but flinched in pain, the bruises had yet to heal. Instead he sulks quietly, mumbling under his breath.

The Player held his fist up to Squigly, prompting her to join him in a celebratory fistbump for beating up Samson but she merely tilted her head in confusion, unfamiliar with the gesture given to her.

"What?" He asked now facing Squigly after realizing she unintentionally left him hanging. "Not gonna take the hint?"

Before Squigly or Leviathan could answer Filia picks herself up, surprised to see her friend was in one piece. "Player? Thank goddess you're safe! What're you doing out here?" She asked now getting his attention.

"I was on my way back to the hotel to see if you were there but the streets were a complete disaster and I couldn't make my way around the debris. I came here to make a detour but when I got here I saw you fighting with-" He had his thumb pointed back to Squigly, still in the dark in regards to her name, "-Uh, with uh, this girl and so I came over here as quickly as I could. Look. Filia, I need your help. It's Umbrella, she's in danger and I know I won't be able to save her on my own."

"Umbrella? What happened to her?!"

"There's no time to explain! ...Well, actually, I could be using this time to explain. Basically her 'mother' has some kind of tie in with the Skullgirl and these bad people are trying to lure her to the Skullgirls lair so they can make another."

Filia placed her hand up to her chest in a gasping gesture. The news horrified her but she lowers her hand, now expressing determination. "Then we should hurry! I may not know what's going on but I refuse to let anyone bring harm to my frien-

Just then Squigly delivered a quick and non-lethal chop to Filia's neck, performing a brachial knockout, which instantly took her out. Filia fell to her knees before falling onto her side, the attack knocked out Samson as well.

"Filia!" Not anticipating Squigly's actions the Player rushed to Filia's side, gently tapping the side of her face. "Come on, wake up. Wake up! What did you do?"
"Don't worry. I didn't hurt her, she'll just be unconscious for a little while." Squigly answered.

Leviathan nods, assuring the Player the pair would be fine. "It's for the best. We can't risk these two getting near the Skull Heart. Samson...that fool, leading such a young girl to a fate worse than death."

"You know him?" The Player asked.

"Samson was once respectable. I even considered him a friend, but that was a long, long time ago – even before there was a Skull Heart. I know not what he seeks to accomplish now, but it will not end well for him or that girl."

After Leviathan finished explaining the Player's gaze fell back upon the unconscious Filia, the only person he knew that could help him take on whatever threat awaited them at the cathedral.

"What am I going to do now? She was all I had left. I have no idea where Cerebella is and Parasoul is fighting tooth and nail to buy me time. Filia was my only hope."

"...Lorenzo will have to wait." Squigly directed her words to Leviathan. "We have to get to the Skull Heart before they do. It shouldn't be too hard to find – I can feel the Skullgirl's presence again."

The serpentine parasite hung his head in shame, feeling guilty over Squigly's involvement with the situation. "I'm sorry to have dragged you into this...but I shall follow you to the end!"

Squigly places her palm on the side of her partner's face and nuzzled her cheek into him, affectionately showing that she had no ill-will toward him. "You already did that, remember? Now we should get going." She noticed the Player hadn't moved an inch from Filia's side, he wasn't even aware that Squigly was paying his situation any mind. She walked over to him and tapped his shoulder. "Aren't you coming?"

"Huh?"

"Your friend is in danger and you need someone to help you save her."

"Wait, you're going to help me?"

"Of course. Why do you think I took action against Filia? If she gets close to the Skull Heart then chances are she'll make a grab for it and once she does we'll have a new Skullgirl on our hands. I can't let that happen. I will destroy the Skullgirl and the Heart at once. That'll prevent another crisis...or at least for about seven years." Squigly extended her hand out to him, showing a supportive smile behind her stitches. "Don't worry I'm more than capable of handling whatever we may come across."

The Player gazed at her palm for a brief instance and then back up to her smiling face until finally back to Filia. "...Okay. Let's do it." He took Squigly's hand and accepted her help.

Wrapping her hand around his Squigly helped the Player off of the ground, nodding at him to show she was pleased with his choice. "I don't believe we've been introduced. My name is Sienna Contiello, but you can call me Squigly." She curtsied to him.

"And I am Leviathan, the pleasure is all mine."

"Squigly and Leviathan...I'll try to remember those. You can call me-"

"Player, right?" Squigly asked before he could finish his sentence.
"No, no, that's not -"

"Filia mentioned that already so we're already well acquainted with your name. Its certainly unusual and yet it rings familiar."

"Certainly does." Leviathan added. "Though my memory is a bit hazy I do recall hearing such a name in the past."

The Player shook his head to dismiss her claim. "No! Seriously, that's not really my -"

Her attention was then directed to the north. "Wait! ...I can feel it."

"Feel what?" The Player asked.

"The Skullgirl, she's close. Her power is faint but it's there. We should hurry."

The time for action was now. The meeting with Marie and more importantly Umbrella's rescue from the clutches of a cruel fate. Squigly and Leviathan took the lead as the Player watched them off, sighing heavily from the fact that he couldn't reveal his real name, and what was the point of even trying at this point, chances were high nobody in Canopy was going to let him anyway, but there were more important matters at hand and he went along with it.

Back on the Meridian rooftops Parasoul and Valentine fought fiercely against one another, matching each other's attacks, the two seemed equal. Adam, however, was out of commission, lying unconscious and bruised away from the girls. Valentine performs a series of agile flips away from Parasoul to get some distance between them.

"Hm. Not bad, princess. I didn't expect you to put me on the ropes as much as you are."

Parasoul's scowl remained unfazed, she had no interest in anything Valentine had to say and wanted to keep her distracted for as long as possible. Valentine, on the other hand, kept her cool and met Parasoul's fierce eyes with an unchanged carefree glare.

"Your silence speaks volumes, but can I ask you something? Do you honestly have faith in that little man?" Valentine was of course referring to the Player as she reached for her bonesaw.

The princess held out Krieg in a defensive position, taking her stance and ready to react to Valentine for whatever it was she had in store. "It's hard for you to understand, isn't it?" She finally broke her silent demeanor with a question. "I know it must be hard having no one around. No one to put your faith in. No comrades or friends just loneliness. I pity you, Valentine. Fooling yourself with this façade. Do I have faith in the Player? If I don't have faith in him then there's nothing worth having faith in, same goes to all my loved ones and those who fight beside me as allies."

Valentine's expression gradually diminished with each word Parasoul gave her it began to touch upon a more personal subject which didn't entertain the mysterious nurse. "Enough talk. I'm going to enjoy ripping you to shreds." Her voice was heavy with spite.

Parasoul remained unintimidated by Valentine's personality shift and huffed. "And I'm gonna enjoy making you uglier, bitch."

Valentine rushes in without warning and swings her bonesaw at Parasoul who was able to protect herself with a perfectly timed guard. While her first swing failed Valentine quickly brought the saw back, this time aiming for Parasoul's throat with a diagonal slash but just like the first attack Parasoul was able to block the slash with Krieg. Having successfully blocked two of Valentine's strikes Parasoul wasted no time in countering with an attack of her own, a side kick meant for Valentine's
abdomen but thanks to the latter's reflexes she was able to jump out of the way and land a few feet away from Parasoul.

Valentine and Parasoul charge for one another and clash blows with their weapons, this time Parasoul aggressively lead the assault and chased Valentine down whenever they were blown away from one another. Valentine's speed and agility enabled her to dodge Parasoul's best attempts with relative ease and with the constant back and forth between them the two were fighting on even ground.

While the women were fighting a special female Egret was stationed on one of the cities skyscrapers with a high powered rifle whose design was based on the Barrett M82. The Egret watched the fierce battle below through the scope of her rifle and was getting a focus on the target but the speed of the fight and constant movement shifts around the rooftops below made it difficult to get an accurate eye. The Egret was very well disciplined and kept her patience in check, watching in absolute silence while also studying the fight.

The fight rages on as Valentine runs literal circles around Parasoul, tossing various syringes at the her opponent but her efforts were futile as the princess was able to reflect and dodge each projectile. Valentine's speed reached a superhuman pique, she was able to leave behind after images of herself which gave the illusion that Parasoul was trapped in a small dome of Valentine clones.

A purple syringe flies toward the back of Parasoul's head but she was already well aware of the oncoming attack and moved her head to the side so that the needle missed, before it got out of her reach she grabbed the syringe by the pump and tossed it back with a swift 180 turn.

The syringe just barely missed Valentine's face making her slow down enough to give Parasoul her window to escape the position she was in. She rushes toward Valentine and attacks relentlessly only for her enemy to match the aggression.

Valentine flips overhead and sends a reverse high kick for the back of Parasoul's head, attempting to strike before the Renoir had the chance to turn around, but just looking over her shoulder was enough for Parasoul to dodge the heel of Valentine's kick with a smooth duck, she swings Krieg around while the former recovers but Valentine was swift enough to improvise a webster front flip and slip by Krieg's crescent slash.

Valentine, now on one knee after flipping, looks over her shoulder only to see Parasoul still on the chase meaning she had to react faster than usual. She was able to turn around but a dodge to gain distance wouldn't have been possible, instead Valentine dips back onto her backside, assuming the lowest possible limbo like stance, to dodge Parasoul's second crescent swing. Seeing that she was able to narrowly dodge the attack she jumps back up and gets onto her feet.

"I've had enough of your bullshit!" She shouts while Parasoul performed a basic overhead swing.

Valentine manages to sidestep the attack resulting in a miss for the princess, as the tip of Krieg hits the ground Valentine moves in to perform an aikido - Tachi Dori disarming technique: grabbing Parasoul's right arm, which she used to wield Krieg, with her left hand and, once she had a tight grip, threw her elbow back into Parasoul's throat which gave her enough time to switch hands to her right in order to grab Krieg's handle as Parasoul's grip loosened from the blow. Valentine threw her elbow back far enough to the point where Parasoul was forced to fall down.

The princess hits the ground hard but instantly recovers onto her feet, though she was now disarmed. She wrapped her hand around throat and lightly coughed with one eye closed much to Valentine's amusement.
"I wonder how tough you are without your precious little weapon." She teased the redhead with Krieg in her position only to toss the living weapon off the roof and down to the city below.

Parasoul lowered her hand from around her neck and reached for her walkie-talkie, holding it up to her ear. "Take the shot."

Valentine was initially confused by this but was able to comprehend what Parasoul was getting at with a seemingly random command. Her eyes widened and she pulls her head back as the sound of a loud bang echoed throughout the city, a bullet just barely scraped Valentine's forehead. She looks down to see the hole in the roof, knowing that if the shot were to hit most of her skull would be gone but nevertheless she dodged it and smiled.

"Pfft. An assassination attempt? Was that your big pla-" Before she was able to finish her sentence, just as she went to face Parasoul, she was met with a straight punch to the face, making her head jerk back from the impact. "AUGH!"

Parasoul wasn't only trained to fight with Krieg she was very proficient in hand-to-hand combat, if Valentine thought she was useless without weapons then she was sorely mistaken. The injured nurse held her nose and looked back to the attacking princess only to receive a right hook to the jaw, making her back away from the impact. Parasoul went on to continue punching her back before uppercutting her. Valentine stumbles but regains her composure, she stood and watched as Parasoul calmly walked up to her.

"Damn you…" She muttered.

Valentine impulsively runs in and swings at her Parasoul who mimics the sidestep she did earlier and brings around a spinning backfist which lands a devastating blow, a loud slap emits from Parasoul's fist as she strikes Valentine, making the blue haired woman fall back. Valentine collapses onto one knee, giving her a chance to spit blood off to the side before looking up to see Parasoul walking toward her again.

"Heh. That was really good. I wasn't expecting you to be so fast with your fists." Valentine commented, now standing back up.

Hearing her words Parasoul actually cracked a smile as she continued taking her time approaching.
Revelations

As the full moon towered over the Grand Cathedral it highlighted the eerie and ominous presence of the establishment. Seeing the building sent shivers up the Player spine but this was natural however his mission was more important than letting fear get the better of him and with Squigly at his side his nerves were more calm. The two continued their walk down the pathway that lead to their destination.

"There it is..." He said while pointing ahead. "This is the place where everything goes wrong."

"Really? But it doesn't look out of the ordinary. It appears to be a regular church." Said Squigly.

"I'm sure. Man," He says with a shiver "just looking at it gives me the creeps."

"He's right." Leviathan joins. "With each step the Skullgirl's trail becomes more potent."

Squigly closed her eyes to focus and just as Leviathan claimed Marie's presence got stronger. "...Ah. Now I see. I sense it too. It feels as if she's in a weakened state."

"Yeah. It's because she used most of her power to save the citizens in New Meridian." The Player thought back to Marie's actions. The image of her struggling to prevent casualties replayed in his head continuously. "And nobody could help her. Nobody would've wanted to..."

"Hm. It is quite unusual to see a Skullgirl perform acts of heroism." Said Leviathan.

"Skullgirls are really that bad?" The Player asked.

The question took Leviathan by surprise. Surely everyone knows who the Skullgirl is considering the international crisis they have brought in the past. "Judging by that question I assume you're not from around here?" The serpent parasite inquired curiously.

"No. I've only been around for a little while but on my way to this land I read up on the kingdom's history, or at least what little I could, and I've read up on Nancy, the last Skullgirl."

Hearing that name made Squigly and Leviathan look to the Player in mild shock.

"Nancy?" Leviathan questioned. "Nancy...Renoir? The queen of our very kingdom?"

"Yeah. That's her. She became the Skullgirl in hopes of establishing peace between the warring kingdoms."

As the Player continued walking Squigly stopped in her tracks.

"...But- No... That can't be right." She muttered. "Leviathan, the last Skullgirl... It was-"

"I know. I know..." Leviathan answered before Squigly could mention the name of the previous Skullgirl.

"Is something wrong?" The Player asked after realizing Squigly wasn't following.

"Player, are you certain the book you've read was creditable?" Leviathan asked as Squigly remained silent.

"Yeah. It's got to be more credible than a wiki, right? Nancy's daughter, Parasoul, is the leader of the
kingdom now. Shouldn't you guys already know about this?"

Squigly clenched her fist at her chest, due to her sleeves being so long the Player couldn't see. She lowered and shook her head. "This doesn't make any sense. The last Skullgirl was my mother."

The Player tilts his head in confusion. "You and Parasoul are related?"

"Of course not!" Squigly answered.

"Did the book mention who the last Skullgirl was? Before Nancy."

"Um. I think it was Selene Contiello."

The fact that he knew her name made Squigly and Leviathan's eyes widen. The realization that he was telling the truth hit them hard.

"Wait a second, Sienna, isn't your last name Conti-" He paused for a second. "Oh. Ooooooooooooh."

"We've been asleep for 14 years…" Squigly stated while staring into space.

"That would explain why New Meridian is so unrecognizable for us." Leviathan replied.

"What do you mean you were asleep for 14 years?" The Player asked.

Even though Squigly was letting everything sink in she was still able to keep a level head. She lowered her hand and made eye contact with the Player. "It's all so confusing. You see, I...I died 14 years ago. I died at the hands of the Medici when they betrayed my family. I don't know why they did it but my mother ended up becoming the Skullgirl because of it."

"She was very distraught over the death of her family and in a sense of desperation made a wish upon the Skull Heart to have them back." Leviathan explained. "Her wish was granted when her family was reanimated as the undead but by then she was already far gone."

The Player crossed his arms and thought back to when Parasoul affiliated Squigly with the rest of the undead Marie summoned. "So you're like a zombie? If that's the case shouldn't you be under the Skullgirls influence?"

"Leviathan prevents that." Squigly answered. "It's because of him I'm able to remain myself."

"I see. So whenever the Skullgirl gets revived you come back to life because you're still technically dead but unlike the others you have your freewill. Were you alive to see your mom as the Skullgirl?"

"...Yes." She answered regretfully. "I'm also the one who fought her."

"And the one who witnessed her demise." Leviathan added to inform the Player who could only look on at the sadness that overcame both Squigly and the parasite. "Our mission is to use what little time we have against the Skullgirl. Whenever she may rise we'll be there to see her carnage end."

The Player stood in silence, unable to form words at the ordeal Squigly had to endure over 14 years. Losing her family and dying at a young age only to be revived to witness the death of her mother as a monster bent on destruction. The Skullgirl was truly a force to be reckoned with and even though Marie was different it didn't change the fact that she was still a Skullgirl who would eventually have to be stopped.

In their time of need the Player walks up to the duo and placed his hand on Squigly's shoulder for support. "...I'm sorry. I'm sorry you two had to endure so many hardships. I know we just met today
and I'm honestly not that great when it comes to being all heroic, since chances are high this demon nun is going to be waiting for us at the cathedral, but I want to do everything in my power to help you two, just as you're helping me with this rescue. Let's end this."

The look in his eyes helped Squigly and Leviathan get a better understanding of who the Player was. Wishing on the Skull Heart was out of the question for the boy at this point, it was as if the pair were spiritually bonding through this act of sincerity which unknowingly had a strange bonding phenomenon occur between them, in the case of Squigly and Leviathan a liberating force from deep within sparked a weak flame that grew into a burning fire. It was hard to describe but they express their acceptance with a smile.

"How chivalrous. Thank you!" She replied in a nearly choked up tone.

"Despite our brief introductions I feel we were destined to meet." Leviathan smiled as he was happy to accept the Player's help.

The Player gave the two a determined smirk and nods. "Right. I feel the same way. Now, let's go save Umbrella."

With newfound support and trust within the group they run ahead to infiltrate the Grand Cathedral. The Player placed his arm out in front of Squigly to prevent her from entering, just as a precaution. He slowly opens the large doors and peers his head inside to find nobody around, which was becoming pretty common with every visit.

"Is something wrong?" Squigly asked while watching his cautious actions.

"...It depends. Usually when I come here I get ambushed by this crazy nurse and her terrifying sidekick. A friend of mine was able to distract the nurse but I don't see the nun. I think it's safe."

With a gentle push the old doors creaked loudly thus breaking the silence within the cathedral. After Squigly passes by the Player slowly pushes back on the double doors for an attempt at a quieter mission but to no avail as this only seemed to make the creaking louder. The doors echoed throughout the building until they were finally closed.

While walking down the church's aisle Squigly and Leviathan survey their surroundings. "She's close." Leviathan mutters.

"Very close." Squigly replied. She walked down the aisle until she came up to the large statue featuring a monstrous woman holding an upside cross in one arm.

The Player wandered off to the parallel aisle and checked the wall for a secret passage. "That's because she's right underneath our feet." He said while knocking gently on the wall.

Squigly looks over to him. "How do you know that?"

"Didn't I tell you? I've been here before and each visit I've met the Skullgirl. I don't know why she doesn't relocate since I came here with friends. Chances are it's because I'm not a great enough threat to even consider it."

"I don't recall you mentioning that but what exactly are you doing?"

He makes his way over to one of the many statues dedicated to the monstrous figure and carefully inspected the stone masterpiece. It wasn't as big as the one at the center of the church but it was still quite impressive in size. He crouched down and felt wind blowing from the bottom.
"Looking for the way into her lair. I think this is it." He pressed his shoulder against the stone and tried moving it but it was much too heavy. "Rrgh! …C'mon, budge! Nnnnnnnnnn... Gah. It's no use."

Squigly walks over to him and placed her hands on the side. "Let me help."

"Think we can do it? Okay, let's give it a shot. I'm ready."

"Alright... Push!"

The two work together and used all the strength they could muster but the statue was still too much for them. The harder they tried the louder their grunts became. After taking up to a minute trying to make the statue move they made no progress.

The Player leans his back and against the stone and sighs. "Damn. What'd they do? Superglue this thing to the floor?"

"It is quite hefty. Leviathan, maybe we can punch through it."

Leviathan considers this and one combined attack came to mind. "I suppose it's worth a short. Shall we try Liver Mortis Seria?"

"Rigor Mortis what now?" The Player asked with a raised brow.

Squigly assumes a special stance: her right leg was positioned back while the left took point in front, she stood on the tip of her toes. Squigly crossed her right arm along her midsection and held the left back.

"Please, step aside." She closed her eyes and goes silent.

The Player heeds her words and moves away from the statue as a flash of pure energy formed a rose colored wing out of the hole in Squigly's back.

"Focus..." Leviathan coaches his host.

"Right."

After giving it a second Squigly felt she was at her pique and was on the verge of taking action but Leviathan, who sensed her intent, stopped her with a calm "Let it build."

The rose energy reappeared in the form of a flame burning around Leviathan's jaw which then consumed his entire head. The flame intensified the more Squigly deepened her concentration.

Now she's reached the height of her focus. She pulls her front foot back and stomps forward as the arm she held back is guided by Leviathan whose jaw acted as a flaming gauntlet. Squigly punches the statue and shatters it into a thousand pieces. Leviathan's opened jaws sent forth a powerful burst of concentrated energy which was the source of the immense power.

The Player took a dive behind the safety of one of the nearby benches to protect himself from the flying rubble and shields his ears from the shock.

He poked his head out after he felt it was safe to see Leviathan return to his regular form and Squigly exhaling. After destroying the statue the passageway leading to catacombs was right before them.

"Damn, Sienna."
She looks over to him as he approached. "What?"

"Didn't think you were strong enough to do that. That was awesome."

"I can't take all the credit, this power comes from Leviathan. Without him I wouldn't have been able to perform such feats."

"Happy to be of assistance." Leviathan proudly holds his head up. "But it seems we've found what we were looking for."

"Indeed." Squigly agrees now looking to the catacombs entrance.

The Player nods with a loud gulp. "Yep. This is it... C'mon, let's get inside."

Despite not wanting to venture any farther the Player leads them down the long stairway to the catacombs. Leviathan provided them with light by using his tail as a candle, which was burning a rosy flame. The deeper they descended the stronger the Skullgirls presence became, it was almost as if they were sinking into a pool of Theonite.

Once they reached the bottom they were immediately greeted to Marie standing over an unconscious Umbrella.

"Umbrella!" The Player shouted. He was ready to run over to her but was stopped by Leviathan who wrapped his tail around his arm. "Let me go!"

"Don't act so rashly! That's the Skullgirl."

"But..." He was acting on impulse because Umbrella was laying on the ground.

He feared it was already too late but Leviathan managed to keep him from making a potentially fatal mistake despite him already being acquainted with Marie, though Leviathan wouldn't have known that.

The Skullgirl was already well aware the group was on their way and once she sensed Squigly's presence she faces the group and gives her undivided attention to the Contiello.

"Your Parasite… it's unusual, how it blocks my control. Yet your connection to the Heart is strong… through it, I can sense that you, too, seek revenge against the Medici's. And against the man who silenced you."

"I believe you're a good person, but the Heart's power is poison. Even when you used it to save those people, I could feel its hate growing inside you." Squigly thinks back on the time her mother was the Skullgirl and all the painful memories that came with it. "I've seen where that hatred ends."

"You are not immune to its corruption, either." Says Marie as the ground begins to shake underneath the Player and Squigly's feet. "You think you can resist the Skull Heart? I can feel your will falter. Before long, its power will overwhelm you!"

Using what little strength she had left Marie's body was set ablaze with a blue aura, possibly an overwhelming surge of Theonic energy called forth from the Skull Heart, and it soon unleashes into an expanding dome of energy that bursts from Marie's body and pushes toward the Player and Squigly.

"OH CRAP!" The Player cried out as the blinding light from the expanding energy enveloped him. Squigly tried to act in order to protect him but it was too late and they were all consumed by the light.
In seconds the dark swallowed the Player.

"...Wake up." A voice faintly called out from the abyss. "Wake up."

The darkness started to flicker as a first person view catches a glimpse of Marie standing before them. The recovering sight belonged to the Player, who was now awake to realize he was in the same white void where he encountered Marie just the other day.

"...This place again? Am I dead this time?"

Marie shook her head to dismiss the question. "No. I didn't hurt you or your friends, I merely put you in a state of rest. Your physical body is in the catacombs while you sleep. Think of this as a lucid dream. Unfortunately this is the only way I'm able to communicate with you."

The Player placed his hand on his weary head, trying to get an understanding of all the chaos. He finally found the strength to pick himself up so that he was standing with Marie.

"No point in me trying to make sense of what goes on around here." He said now that he found his footing. "If you say we're in a dream then I believe you but why didn't you kill us? We're here to stop your plans."

"Plans?" She questioned.

"You want to turn Umbrella into a Skullgirl."

"No. My only goal as the Skullgirl is to see the Medici's pay for their crimes. I would never bring the burden of the Skull Heart onto anyone."

"What do you mean by 'burden'?"

"I accepted the Skull Heart in hopes of challenging a world run through with corruption, but it is part of an even greater monster that binds me to its will. The only purpose of this so-called 'artifact' is to spread death."

The books the Player read in the past supported Marie's statement so it wasn't too hard to believe when she explained the true nature behind the Skull Heart and while Marie is vastly different from past Skullgirls she still wishes to bring justice to the Medici's, which only brings more bloodshed.

"No matter what you wish for the Skull Heart would sooner corrupt your wish than fulfill it, pure or not." She added, providing more helpful insight. "Ultimately there is no such thing as a 'pure wish' because the nature of wishes in itself is selfish."

"You serious? I never even thought of it that way. In a way it actually makes sense." The Player placed his index finger and thumb upon his chin, shaking his head at his own failure to realize how dangerous the artifact actually is, despite having read numerous books that vaguely detailed it. "Okay, okay...so the Skull Heart, from what I'm hearing, is actually evil. Its goal is to spread death by turning women into monsters and if the Skullgirl under its influence dies it seduces the next candidate on an offer they can't refuse: a wish of their choice. If its this big of a problem why not destroy it?"

"Destroying the Skull Heart will only delay the inevitable. Surely you must've know that. If someone destroys it then it will just return in the next seven years. Destroying it is only a temporary solution."

"...So nobody, other than the Skull Heart, wins. In the end its just manipulating everyone to rely on its power, exposing the weakness in the human heart, so the cycle can continue."
Marie nods with a melancholy expression. "Exactly. Though I'm able to withstand the Heart's corruptible influence my fate will ultimately end in tragedy and then onto the next Skullgirl. I feel its no coincidence your friend was seeking out the Skull Heart at such a young age. Something has been set in motion and I fear the worst if nothing is done about it. The true horror of the Skull Heart comes from those who seek it."

"What do you mean?"

"The world is already well acquainted with the artifact and the monster it brings with it. It's part of our history and the cause of so much sorrow and grief. By now we've all seen the results of wishing upon it... Yet the desire to have a single wish granted is enough to keep the cycle going. We're willing to become monsters to get what we want. The fact that we're still in this loop scares me."

The Player was finally understanding, or at least getting a small glimpse of the truth behind this cursed fate women were doomed to endure. He remained quiet, now thinking of the horror that would befall Filia if she were to use the Skull Heart. His own search for the artifact, though totally asinine, made him see the flaw in himself.

Words couldn't express how he felt, and not just for himself but for Filia, Umbrella and Parasoul as well. When he placed his hand on Parasoul's shoulder, after Valentine explained her plan to guide Umbrella to the catacombs, he felt her trembling. He was able to feel the horror and despair that struck the once strong princess.

"...Just like Parasoul." He finally replied to Marie, "She was terrified at the thought of Umbrella becoming the Skullgirl. It makes sense especially after seeing the monster her mother turned into."

"Despite it all I still believe our greatest chance at stopping the Skull Heart lies with you. The bonds you're able to create are the key, never forget that. Destroy the threads of fate. Save everyone from their sorrow. Free them from this curse that plagues our world, including me – please."

Their meeting was finally coming to a close as the void began to fade into darkness. The last glimpse the Player had was of Marie shedding a single tear while maintaining her iconic emotionless glare. Before she faded out of view he reaches out for her but his attempt to reach her was futile as everything around him is overcome by a dark void.

As his mind sinks back into the nothingness he could hear various grunts and clashes echo in his temporary absent mind, these sounds hinted at a battle taking place. Eventually the Player came back to his senses and found himself lying on the blue veined floor of Marie's lair. He looks up and sees a heavily injured and weak Marie being confronted by Squigly. His consciousness returned to him at the end of an unseen battle between the two girls.

"Think about what you're doing..." The tired Marie calmly addressed Squigly with heavy breaths between her words. "Lorenzo is on the run, and his empire is vulnerable and in disarray. Don't throw away our only chance to break his grip on New Meridian!"

As much as Squigly didn't want to face Marie she found herself having no choice once Marie put the massive strain on her body by using the Skull Heart's power to supercharge herself. Despite their confrontation the young Contiello remained sympathetic to Marie. "I'm sorry, I..."

Seeing Marie in such a critical state worried the Player and after everything he was told on the other side he couldn't allow her to perish at the hands of Squigly. "Stop it…!" He called out.

"Huh?" Hearing his voice made Squigly and Leviathan face his direction. "Thank goodness. You're awake." She expresses relief at his recovery with a gentle exhale. "Are you ok?"
"I'm fine. I just... Well. Sienna, Leviathan...You guys can't-"

Just then a disturbing force poisoned the air with its evil intent. A mutated Double reveals herself behind the Player much to the horror of Squigly and Leviathan.

"Behind you!" Leviathan exclaimed.

The Player took a quick gander over his shoulder only to meet the furious face of Double in a horrifying chimera form of a human, insect and reptile. The Player jumps at the sight of her extending appendage, which looked similar to a human hand with an eye at the center of her palm.

"You were given another chance, yet all you do is disappoint!" The demonic nun spoke to the group in her distorted voice.

Unable to defend himself the Player closes his eyes and throws up his arms to shield himself from Double's face but just as she went for the kill the sound of flesh quickly shredding apart was heard followed by a loud and heavy thud against ground. Double's arm was severed by the timely arrival of Filia and Samson who saved the group with a spiraling Hairball strike.

The attack made Double wince in pain, having not anticipated their arrival. "WHAT!?" She snarled viciously at Filia as the red cracks in her pupiless eyes intensified.

The Player lowered his guard and saw Double's fleshly arm twitching at his feet. He takes a step back and realizes Filia came to their rescue. Both he and Squigly express immense joy at their reinforcements.

"Filia! You're helping us?" Squigly asked.

"Yeah. We are." Samson answered with a cocky smirk. "So can the high-and-mighty crap."

The Player rolled his eyes and groaned heavily. "A simple 'Yes' would've sufficed."

"I knew I should've left your ass to die!" Samson wasted no time in jumping into an argument with the Player much to the chagrin of Filia.

"Guys! Not now!" The amnesiac raised her voice at the boys which seemed to put them in check or at least shut them up.

Leviathan shook his head and turned his attention to a more important matter which was Filia herself. "While your assistance is appreciated, your ill intentions are an entirely separate matter."

"We'll worry about the Heart later. Let's team up and take care of this monster!" A determined Filia took her stance and was ready to throw down with Squigly.

Squigly happily accepted Filia's offer and stepped forward, assuming her fighting position ahead of the Player. "I would be delighted. But whatever you do, don't let your guard down. This foul thing is brimming with the same power as the Skull Heart."

"That girl is a Medici, Squigly. Knowing that, do you still wish to ally with her? The Contiellos and the Medicis... Need I remind you how things worked out the last time your two families?"

Double used the vengeful fire Squigly carried with her to provoke irrational thoughts for the young fighter. Squigly was instantly reminded of the slaughter her family suffered at the hands of the Medicis, and chances were high that it was going to stay that way, the bad blood was still there but hearing this shocked Filia, who had no idea.
Before Filia could even question this crucial bit of information Squigly remained stern and frowned at Double, showing nothing but disinterest in her manipulating choice of words. "I'll let her actions speak for her. Not you!"

Filia immediately found herself smiling at Squigly's willingness to stay by her side as an ally and didn't even worry about her ties with the Medici family, rather she focused on dealing with the abomination standing before them.

"Come on, Samson! Let's make a good impression."

"Right on her faces!" Samson remarked.

Now that the girls were ready the Player stepped back to let them handle things with Double, he went to take Marie somewhere safe.

"Samson and I will create a diversion so that you can land a hit on her." Filia whispered over to Squigly.

Squigly nods without taking her eye off of Double to prevent any surprise attacks from the latter. "Got it."

Filia jumps back into a quick backflip and allowed Samson to handle the rest, he covers his host in a hair cocoon and before they touch the ground Samson sprouts long wings, which appeared similar to that of an insects, and with his newly formed appendages he charges for Double.

"You're not winning this time!" Filia shouted as the wind blew past her face.

Double now had the intent to kill and was able to regenerate her lost arm at an alarming rate much to the shock of Filia and Samson. The two were under the impression that since she was handicapped the fight would've been in their favor but this new development was going to prove difficult. Samson pulls up and flies himself and Filia pass Double, she reaches out her hand in an attempt to grab them but Samson's speed was greater leaving Double to watch as they flew off into the distance.

With her back turned this was the perfect opportunity for Squigly to strike. She races over to the distracted Double and clenches her fist, once she got close enough she threw a punch however Double twists her head 180 degrees much to the disgust of the attackers.

Double counters Squigly's attack by swinging her newly regenerated arm back to make Squigly punch her forearm. The moment her attack was rendered useless Double hooks the younger fighter with a left swing and punches her down into the floor.

Samson circled around to help them, flying up to Double while her back was turned. Filia throws a straight punch at Double's head but she moves to the side and thrusts her elbow back into Filia's face, sending her flying back with a pain filled cry.

Squigly recovers from the ground and uses Leviathan to trampoline herself back up to transition into a soaring double kick, but Double was still on top of her game and dodges perfectly to the side, backhanding Squigly with her large mutated arm which sent her flying back. Filia and Samson were able to recover quickly and were able to attack right after Squigly got hit, Filia kneed Double on the top of her head with enough force to knock her down onto her knees.

"Nnngh!" The monstrous nun let out a minor grunt from the attack as she fell to the floor on all fours.

"Ha! How do you like that?!" Filia cheered.
"Don't let your guard down!" Leviathan warned after Squigly picked herself up.

It was too late for the heads up as Double threw her leg up and kicked Filia in the gut, knocking the wind out of the schoolgirl. Filia was left to cradle her stomach and Samson was having a hard time keeping flight since he was able to feel the pain Filia endured. Double gets up and retracts her limbs back to their normal state making her appear as a normal woman again.

Thanks to Leviathan's mobile capabilities Squigly re-entered the fray before any more harm could come to Filia. She made the attempt to come underhand for an uppercut with her Draugen Punch but, just like before, Double dodges and wraps her hand around Squigly's throat where she then extends her arm to slam the Contiello's head into the wall. Filia lands beside Double, still clutching her stomach, and is grabbed around the neck by her attacker who performs the same action of choking her against the opposite wall. Double used enough strength to force their entire bodies through the structure.

The sound of the destructive feud between the girls and the monster echoed throughout the secret passage leading to the deeper depths of the Skullgirls lair but the Player was able to find a good enough spot to lay Marie down. Even though she received heavy damage from her own passive action she was slowly healing.

After laying her down he placed his hand on the side of her cheek and gently pushed her loose hair back behind her ear. "Don't worry. You'll be safe here." A loud crash followed by a minor tremor caused dust and rubble to fall from the ceiling. "...Or at least I hope so."

He lowers Marie's head and stood up, taking a deep breath before coming to terms with knowing he was gonna have to help Filia and Squigly against Double but how? He was only human with no Parasite to back him up but nevertheless his friends were in need.

The Player took a single step but was stopped as Marie reached out and grabbed his wrist. He looks back to her to see that she was looking up to him with one eye open.

"Marie? Are you feeling better?" He asks, now crouching down to her.

"Don't worry about me. You have to look inside yourself and bring out the potential hidden deep with your friend, it's the only way."

"Potential?"

Deeper within the hidden area the battle rages on in a lab like setting with Filia and Squigly jumping back onto a horizontal steel beam after creating an explosion from an earlier jointed attack. As the smoke cloud increased in size Double's hand stretches out from the smoke and grabs the beam, using it to pull herself out of the cloud and soar up to the two.

Squigly and Filia split up just as Double reaches their location. Filia returns and kicks Double off of the beam, making her descend farther into the dark depths but she was able to land on another beam that awaited further down. After landing Squigly uses Leviathan to soar through the air and secretly approach the beast from behind and delivered a powerful knee strike to the back of her head. Double swats her arm around in an attempt to hit Squigly but with Leviathan's aid she was able to dodge with a frontal aerial spin over her head.

Samson rushes back in with Gregor Samson and with Filia tackles Double in the gut which then opened the door for Squigly and Leviathan to gang up on her and punch the violent nun across the jaw. Even though their attacks were successful Double stood her ground and didn't move an inch, to counter she kneels Filia in the chest and palm strikes her in the same spot, hitting her with an invisible
shockwave that sent her flying back and crashing into a wall.

"Filia!" Squigly called out in a panic which, unfortunately, left her open.

Leviathan realized his host was distracted for a split second and warned her with an urgent shout, "Squigly!" but it was too late.

Double grabs the entirety of Squigly's face and runs along the steel beam until she reached the wall, slamming her through the concrete. While Squigly is taken away by Double Samson is able to kick Filia out of their wall imprint, she falls out and hits the ground afterward.

"Filia, you alright?"

"Oooow... That really hurt." She answered while clutching her chest. "Felt like I was hit by a train."

"I know. I felt it too. Wasn't expecting the freak to be this strong but we've got to get this done."

Filia nods and picks herself, brushing the dust off her uniform. "You're right. We've got to help Squigly and Leviathan!"

The aforementioned duo weren't holding up so well against Double by themselves and were overpowered by the various tricks Double had up her sleeve. After knocking them through another concrete pillar Squigly lies face down on the ground after she was knocked around deeper into the lair.

Double approaches the downed fighter and prepared the killing blow. "You're merely a relic from the past. No one will miss you if you die." She taunted with a sadistic grin.

She mutates her arm into a demonic state with sharp piercing fingernails and pulls her arm back for the final blow but Filia and Samson arrives, punching Double in the back of her head and causing her to cancel the attack.

Having saved her friend Filia jumps back and Samson glides them farther away, Double faces them with a heavily annoyed look on her face. She held her arm up at the two, revealing a large mouth on the palm of her hand and once opened fired a barrage of energy bullets, similar to Parasouls Inferno Brigade. Filia and Samson are overwhelmed with a burning sensation leaving her only option to yell out in pain as the bullets shred up her uniform and burn her skin.

Samson takes to his bipedal form and rotates himself around to face the bullet hell Double brought upon them to prevent Filia from taking too much damage, though this didn't make it any better on himself as took the assault until Double finally finished. He tried standing but the pain was too much to handle making him collapse onto one knee while smoke emits from his limbs and small embers burned in his body as a faint sizzle could be heard.

Seeing the two in pain made Double's spirit rise but rather than expressing her delight with words she held her hand up for another round of attacks. Samson was left to watch in horror as she prepared the attack. Just as she fired the bullets Samson and Filia were tackled out of the way by the Player who rolled over to the side just before the impact.

He held Samson close after brushing up against the nearby wall. "Oooh! Ok, you're safe now..." He opened his eyes and saw that he was holding Samson instead of Filia, the two boys show minor disgust after staring into each other's eyes unintentionally and pushed the other away.

"EUGH!" They both stuck out their tongues in a pretty juvenile way of expression.
"Where the hell did you even come from?" Samson asked.

"Oh, is that the kind of thanks I get for saving you?"

"I didn't need saving."

"You're so full of shit."

Filia comes back to her senses only to find the boys bickering. She rubs her head and sighs. "Do you two ever stop?" She asked sounding a bit tired.

"There she is." Said the Player, now placing his hands on Filia's shoulders and turning her around to face him rather than Samson. "Are you ok?"

"A bit roughed up but I can manage. You saved us?"

"Of course. Can't have you two dying just yet we've got a plot to move forward."

Filia narrowed one eye and held one hand up with an incredulous expression but shook her head knowing that what he said wasn't even important right now.

"Thank you. You're always coming through when we need it."

"Yeah but now we've got to end this. If we don't we-"

Interrupting their conversation the wall they were hiding behind explodes, the full impact hitting the Player which blows him and Filia away. The destruction that totaled most of the area caused large chunks of the roof to rain down on the battlefield, seeing this the Player, while still injured, summons up what little strength he has to shelter Filia from the debris by getting on top of her and holding her close to act as a human shield much to her horror.

Hearing the explosions awakened Squigly and Leviathan, they quickly get up and assume their battle stance thinking that Double was still around but she had long moved on to another target. The duo run out of the hole they were punished in and made their way to the larger area where the current events transpired. They watch as Filia and Samson push off the large debris revealing that they survived but the same couldn't be said for the one who shielded them, the Player's body laid still beside them after they got free.

Filia crawls over to him and holds him in her bruised arms for aid. "Hey, get up. We've got to start moving. She's coming." She began to shake his body to wake him but he remained still.

Squigly and Leviathan watch in silence with the former placing her hand over her mouth in a soft gasp.

"Is he going to be alright?" Samson asked.

"He's not waking up." Filia shook him a bit more but it didn't change anything. "Come on, this isn't funny." There was still no response and after trying over and over it began to scare her. "Please start moving. You didn't have to do that for us. We could've stopped it on our own...We didn't need you to protect us. You knew you couldn't stop it so why? Come on...Come on! wake up!"

Tear droplets hit the Player's face a result of Filia's sorrow, she slowly brings him close and cradles her friend into her chest while struggles to keep her emotions in check.

"...Aw. Damn, kid. I-..." Samson was nearly left speechless feeling Filia's grief, a pain which was
far greater than any physical wound and on par with the guilt she felt for Painwheel.

The destruction finally clears and Double is revealed to be standing over the grieving Filia, offering a prayer to the Player. "Goddessspeed, young one. He died trying to protect a miserable pile of secrets." Filia's grip around him tightened and soon her sadness was slowly overcome with anger at her taunting words. "Repent, for your death is nigh..."

"Shut up..." Filia warned.

"Do you have a vendetta against me for your own incompetence? The trinity has deemed you...acceptable. Wish upon the Skull Heart and bring back your ally."

Squigly and Leviathan jumps down to Double and assume their stance. "Enough!" Squigly shouts. "We're not going to let you manipulate anyone to keep this charade going!"

Filia takes one last look down at the Player and grits her teeth in frustration. She gently lays him down and stands up, facing Double with a fierce glare.

"You're still going to fight?" Samson asked.

"He gave us this chance... I refuse to let that go to waste." She answered with tears still flowing down her cheeks.

Samson came to respect his hosts words and actually felt the same way. "You're right. Let's get this done."

Double's manipulating ways pass right over Filia's head thus making her anger rise once more. Squigly and Filia were ready for round 2.

"Ignorant children...you would rebel against the Great Mother?"

The ground underneath Double caves in and she is launched into the air as pillar of flesh. Leviathan and Samson give their hosts the mobility needed to soar after her, they fly into the air and even surpass Double who had a flying start ahead of them, the two girls circle around and plummet down toward Double and they all clash in midair.

Double shields herself from the girls dual punch by catching both of their fists in her palms, she grips them both tightly and raises up Filia to throw her down to the lower level in order to deal with Squigly who was then quickly punched in the face with Double's free arm, sending her flying away from her current position. The moment Squigly was struck Filia and Samson were already back in the action, Samson was able to fly Filia up from the ground to perform a vertical sex kick but the attack missed as Double moved out of the way making the two meet eye-to-eye for a split second. Double almost immediately swings her fist at Filia only to have her attack blocked with a timely cross of the arms on Filia's end, all while she was still upside down, she grabs onto Double's forearm after the block and tucks her legs in to bring herself up to double heel kick the monster in the face which seemed to do considerable damage.

After being struck Double uses a left swing to try and punch Filia off but she pushes her heels off of her face and Samson flies them away only for Squigly to reappear and kick her in the back of the head. Double swings her arm around to hit the Oprah singer but the girls were now showing dominance over her as Squigly and Leviathan work together to perform a swift aerial maneuver to get under the swing and uppercut Double.

complimenting their successful attack Filia elbows Double on the top of her head. Squigly swings and punches her with a strong left hook, Filia comes around and dive kicks her across the jaw from
the opposite side which was then followed up with a flip kick on the chin by Squigly.

"You impudent brats! I will-!"

Double was beginning to show frustration from the teamwork the pair was able to display but before she could finish her threat Filia and Squigly rush in and deliver a devastating double punch to her stomach, the blow was strong enough to make her stomach cave in which made it seem the girls forearms were penetrating her body. Her eyes widen and blood shoots out of her mouth.

Double was stunned and unable to move just then thoughts of the Player filled Filia's head and how she lost someone close to her. This emotional stress caused a spark to ignite a hidden flame deep within which gave birth to an inextinguishable fire that was finally untamed, Squigly and Leviathan sensed the change in Filia and peered over to her after backing away from Double. Sparks spiraled around Filia before a dark violet aura erupts and consumes Filia in a fiery majesty.

In the eyes of Double she witnessed the silhouette's of the Player and Filia come together as one to grant her this untapped power which, at this point, felt greater than the Skullgirl's. Double could only marvel at Filia's increasing strength leaving her to wonder how hurting someone could bring out such a phenomenon without the use of the Skull Heart.

Squigly and Leviathan were just as amazed and were being pushed back by Filia's fierce aura. Now that they were supercharged Samson began to undergo a drastic physical change and in a matter of seconds he transforms into a gargantuan version of himself. Filia lowers herself to give Samson more room to grow and once he was able to complete this hulking transformation he opens his mouth, stretching it out far wider than one could even prepare for, and with it came a mighty roar.

'Filia, Samson-' The voice of the Player ran through their heads to further fuel them with the power they needed to truly surpass their limits. '-I'm with you guys, finish this and save Umbrella. Go all out and don't hold back!'

"HYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHAAAAHAAAAH!"

Both Parasite and host screamed out to push each other to the limit resulting in Samson upchucking a behemoth of a hairball infused with a giant horned skull that appeared to belong to an unidentifiable creature of some kind, complete with large fangs, it was also tangled with smaller skulls that resembled that of a humans. This devastating ball of destruction was Trichobezoar and was intended to put an end to Double once and for all.

"...! Leviathan!" Squigly was finally able to form words after breaking away from the awe of Filia's power.

"I'm on it!"

The serpentine Parasite was already on the same wavelength as his host and opened his mouth to unleash Dragon Breath, which, as the name implied, came out as a bright purple trail of fire that followed behind Trichobezoar until it was able to latch onto the hair blowing in the wind and set it on fire thus transforming the attack into a giant flaming ball of doom.

Back in New Meridian Parasoul and Valentine are at a standstill after an endless exchange of fists. Both women were bleeding, bruised and at a loss of breath.

"Will you just drop dead already!" Valentine exclaimed in a tired fit.

Parasoul, after wiping the blood from the side of her mouth, brushes her large bang to the side. "As if I'd ever let a good for nothing traitor best me."
"You really know how to piss me off, don't you?"

"And I enjoy every second." The princess curls a taunting smile at Valentine as a means to humor her question.

Valentine rolls her eye and sighs before suddenly taking off and making a dash for Parasoul who, after seeing Valentine making a move, rushed in as well. The two women meet near the center of the roof and cock their fists back before throwing a straight punch and then...

**BOOM!**

They exchange blows with a punch to the other's face but at the same time a ground shaking explosion occurs in the distance, appearing in the form of a large magenta energy sphere with a long beam extended up to, and piercing, the cloudy sky. The clouds split as it seemingly soars into space.

The explosion immediately caught the attention of Valentine and Parasoul who watch in shock as the eruption of energy dies down only to reveal a skull shaped cloud, a suitable stand in for its mushroom counterpart.

"W-What in the world...?" Wide eyed Parasoul felt her heart drop from the magnitude of the shake the initial explosion caused. She was left wondering what could have possibly triggered such a powerful reaction.

Valentine realized the massive energy came from the direction of the Grand Cathedral and already had an idea of what happened. "Something tells me things aren't good. Damn. Looks like we'll have to cancel our date, princess."

"What?" She asked now looking over to Valentine.

Withdrawing a small bottle from her cleavage, which is able to conceal and house these things for some reason, Valentine holds it above her head. "...Next time." She throws the bottle down and it explodes into a cloud of smoke while the remains of a human skeleton scatter throughout the area.

Parasoul covers her face for protection but quickly lowers her arms once the smoke cleared only to see that Valentine fled. "...She ran. I'll have to worry about that later." She grabs her walkie-talkie.

The sniper Egret, who was still overseeing the battle, took up her walkie-talkie and held it to her ear to receive the incoming call from Parasoul. "Boss?"

"Are you safe?" Parasoul asked.

"I'm fine but that explosion... It came out of nowhere. Thankfully the city has been evacuated so I don't think anyone is hurt. Commander, about that woman..."

"We've no need to concern ourselves with her anymore. We did our job and bought time, excellent work distracting her with that misfire."

"Of course, ma'am. Always happy to be of service but why did you want me to miss? I'm sure I could've-"

"It was personal. That's all. Radio out to all surroundings Egrets, once I have Krieg back in my possession we're going to investigate the source of the explosion." 

"Roger!"
The sniper acts on her orders immediately and Parasoul puts away her walkie-talkie, now looking up to the sky with a look of mild worry. 

"….Player, don't let me down."

The combined efforts of Leviathan and the awakened Samson resulted in the destruction of the Grand Cathedral. The building collapsed and deep within the abyss of the catacombs lies the Final Atrium, the final haven for the Skullgirl. Fragments of broken Trinity statues loom overhead as a full moon shines down onto the area. Squigly and Filia stood on a floor of raw energy that functioned as a makeshift floor in the form of thick, bright blue strands with skulls laced into them.

After the rubble and smoke cleared Squigly and Leviathan were surprised to see what awaited their eyes once they were able to see again. "What is this place?" Squigly asked as she looks around at the environment.

Before Leviathan could provide an answer his eye fell upon Filia and Samson who were still shrouded in a heavy aura veil. "Squigly, there!" He pointed his tail in their direction for his host.

Samson slowly reverted back to his normal form on Filia's head and the young fighter stood triumphantly as Double was nowhere to be found. Once Samson reverted the aura around Filia dimmed and eventually faded from around her, everything seemed normal again but with it came an extreme cause of fatigue, she collapses to her knees and breathes heavily from exhaustion.

"Filia!" Squigly called out to her as she ran to her side, kneeling down to her. "Are you alright?"

"….No. I'm not alright." She answers with an emotionless look in her eyes.

"Huh?" She was clearly referring to the Player and Squigly catches on to what she meant. "Oh...That's right. Filia, I'm so sorry. If there was anything I could've done I-"

"Damn, Samson. I didn't think you'd nuke the place." A familiar voice spoke from behind the group, instantly catching their attention. Hearing the voice both Filia and Samson's eyes widen but Squigly looks over her shoulder and gasps in shock. The Player approaches them with his hands tucked away in his pockets smiling casually like nothing was wrong. "I'll admit that was really badass though."

Squigly stood up and tried to find words to express her concern but she couldn't say anything from the amount of joy she felt seeing that Filia's friend was alive, the former was still on the ground, shaking, unable to believe her own eyes.

"You're alive?!" Leviathan asked with a bit of shock in his voice.

"Of course I'm alive, I was just playing dead. I've been through worse but it sure hurt like hell..." He rubs his backside to justify his condition, underneath his clothes he was quite bruised but it sure beat dying.

Squigly found herself laughing at his reaction with Leviathan smiling in turn but Samson wasn't so pleased, it was about to get rough. He took to his bipedal form and pounces onto the Player, grabbing him by the collar of his shirt and shaking him violently.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOU WERE PLAYING DEAD?! WHAT KIND OF SADISTIC IDIOT ARE YOU!?"

The Player grabs onto Samson's wrists to pry him off but it didn't work, all he could do was get Samson to stop jerking him back and forth. "GAH! Let go of me! I had to make it look legit so Filia would've been ready to fight Double! I had it all figured out, you moron! And everything worked out! Now get the hell off of me!"
"DON'T GIVE ME THAT CRAP! YOU TELL ME THE TRUTH OR-"

"OR WHAT?!" The Player leans forward and clashes foreheads with the Parasite, the two were fighting over the other for dominance.

This was the first time Squigly and Leviathan witnessed this kind of interaction between the two and weren't sure if it was in their place to break them up but this, of course, was practically normal for the Player and Samson.

"Samson, that's enough. It's ok." Filia said in a calm tone from behind Samson.

"What?!

"Yeah. Cut him some slack, it's fine. Really."

"But Filia, he-!"

"I know. Let me talk to him, you don't have to strain yourself. Besides you used up so much strength to beat that monster. You deserve a good rest." She smiles and raises her hand up to the back of her head, patting Samson as if trying to calm a pitbull.

There was something soothing about Filia's touch and Samson released the Player and took to his regular form on Filia's head, groaning rebelliously under his breath in order to keep up that tough guy façade to distract from the fact that he actually listened to his host.

The Player got up from the ground and adjusted his collar. "Pfft, finally. Someone who will be reasona-"

SLAP!

He was hit the moment Filia faced him, her palm left behind a sharp stinging sensation on his cheek. He placed his hand over the area she hit and looks at her with a surprised stare.

"…"

"O-Ow! What the hell, Filia?!

"...Explain." Her demanding voice put into light her strict mood or at least the drastic feelings she felt toward the Player for his actions.

"What? But I-"

"Now!" She stomped her foot which intimidated her friend. Samson was left to wonder if this was really the same host. She hadn't really shown this side of her personality before and it was rather new, for everybody involved.

Seeing how serious she was the Player lets out a sigh and lowers his hand. "We only had one shot. There was no way you or Sienna were going to take down Double on your own so a friend helped me come to understand what needed to be done in order to finish her off."

"Friend?"

Just then Marie appeared behind him. Seeing the Skullgirl Squigly and Leviathan almost instinctively took action but after seeing that she was holding an unconscious child in her arms they withheld their premature action, the child in question was Umbrella.
The Player looks over his shoulder and sees Marie in much better shape than she was earlier. He placed his hand on her shoulder and moves her forward. "Yeah. This is Marie and she's the Skullgirl."

"You're friends with a Skullgirl?!" Leviathan questioned while Squigly gasps.

"Yeah. She hasn't caused me any harm and she's been nothing but helpful. It's because of her I was able to help Filia and Samson unlock their potential."

Squigly and Leviathan look to one another before turning their attention back to the Player. "What exactly do you mean?" She asked. "Are you referring to that spike of power that Filia gained during the fight?"

The Player nods. "Yeah. That's exactly what it is. Filia, Samson, remember during the brawl you was able to hear my voice via telepathy?"

Thinking back on it both Fili and Samson were able to recall his exact words just before firing their ultimate attack. "That's right..." Filia replied. "Now that you mention it, yeah. I thought it was just me but you heard it too, Filia?"

"Of course. So...that was actually you?"

"Yep. I did it so Double wouldn't be able to see that I was still alive. Playing dead really fooled her and with it you were able to reach deep within yourself and find the power needed to overcome that cheap mess of flesh and bone."

"What you experienced is known as a 'Heart Sync', this is the power the Player has with those he connects to. I'm not sure where this power comes from or why he's the only one with it but his bond with you has greatly benefited you all. Once you two joined you were able to surpass even my power. Evident by the destruction you caused here. It's a similar act shared with the Skullgirl and Skull Heart. In fact, if you were to fight me with the power he bestows I have no doubt in my mind that you would be able to best me."

"Heart Sync?" Squigly whispered to Leviathan.

"There was once an old tale about this phenomenon but I admit I'm not familiar with the details." He whispers back.

"The big drawback is being extremely tired afterward." The Player continued to explain. "It has a lot of benefits but we don't really have much time to use it since it drains so much energy from our bodies."

"Which is why it's critical you master it."

"In other words it's main character bullshit. I may end up spamming it in the future." The Player says with his arms crossed and a cocky smile much to the confusion of Marie and the others. "Anyway... We should get out of here." Marie turns to the Player and holds Umbrella out to him, he crouches down and takes the unconscious girl in his arms. "Thank you for saving us, Marie."

"Mmm." She nods.

"Skullgirl- I mean... Marie." Filia corrects herself. "I didn't think I would have the chance to meet you like this and...I've been seeking you out to achieve the Skull Heart so I can wish back my lost memories but... I can't. I can't do anything to you now. When I see that I finally have what I've been
searching for right in front of me only to find that I can't take it is really frustrating. More than anything I want my memories back, it's why I've come this far, but you helped the Player and Umbrella. I have to be grateful for that. Thank you."

"We've already met once before, Filia. I admit I wasn't expecting to ever see you again myself or at least not as you are now."

"We've met before?" Filia asked, surprised that Marie revealed this critical information. She then takes a step forward. "Tell me...Who am I?"

Marie regretfully closes her eyes and shakes her head. ".I only know one thing about you, Filia, and it is the only thing I need to know. Medici blood flows through your veins... The blood I have sworn to spill. I sympathize with your frustrations as I have what I've been searching for standing before me but because of your actions and the bond you share with the Player I can't find it in myself to bring you harm."

"A friend of a friend is a friend, right?" The Player interrupts.

The two girls look over to him and Filia smiles. Marie holds an emotionless stare but warms up to his words and smiles as well.

"I wouldn't go that far." Marie responds.

"That's right. That monster did mention you were a Medici." Squigly joined in on the conversation, directing her statement to Filia. "The same people who managed to bring ruin to more lives than one. Including my own."

"The Medici's were the ones who forced me to work for them as well." The Player added. "Remember when I told you about how I was kidnapped? Yeah. They're REALLY bad people. I can understand why so many want them gone. The things they've done..."

Filia lowers her head at these revelations and Samson remained quiet. "I don't know what to say...I didn't know any of this." Filia replied with sadness in her voice. If she truly was a Medici than the sting of knowing her own people caused so much trouble was enough to make her feel guilty for their crimes.

"It doesn't matter." Squigly said after having more than enough time to think about the situation, Filia's acts have proved she's much more than those killers, if anything she was her own person with a new identity thanks to her journey since her memory loss. "What's important to know is that the Heart can never bring happiness. Not for you, your friend, or anyone else."

"She speaks the truth..." Marie laments.

The Player nods, knowing the amnesiacs heart and she couldn't have asked for a better group of friends. She became more confident in her growth since the memory loss to know that she didn't need to rely on the Skull Heart to correct things, each encounter she had helped her grow into realizing all she needed was those who helped pick up the pieces this far and knowing there are still people out there who knows her which means the journey hasn't ended, a journey she was sure to
share with her trusted allies.

"...I know enough about myself to know that memories don't matter – what's done is done, and it's time to move on. But, Carol..." Flashes of Carol, 'Painwheel', rushes through Filia's mind making new guilt rise. "What happened to her is my fault, isn't it? Even if I can't remember it."

"Y'know, the more I think about it the more that doesn't really make any sense. You don't remember but you assume it's your fault." The Player stated on the side and out of view of Filia's moment. Everyone seemed to ignore him regardless so it didn't matter.

"You don't have to worry." Marie said in her monotone voice. "As long as you have the Player by your side everything will correct itself. He has the power to make things right for all those suffering from their torment. Including your friend."

"You really think so?" She asks.

The Player gently kicks the back of her calf to get her attention. "You're doubting me?"

"O-Of course not!"


The Player groans at the Parasite and rolls his eyes. "Oh shut the hell up, Samson. ANWAY, I'm more concerned about the Medici's. For some reason it seems like they're connected to everything that's going on. As if everything chains back to them."

"Which is why I've done everything I could to bring down Lorenzo. Once the Medici's lose their head the organization will suffer a critical blow." Said Marie.

Squigly thought back on the past and remembered Lorenzo's endeavors and then she thinks back to the moment of his cowardice performance back in New Meridian, when he was attempting to flee from Marie in her rampage.

"Lorenzo fought a Skullgirl before, but he never ran." Squigly now had the attention of the others. "Something else has hurt him. He's been weakened and he won't last."

Was that the only bit of closure Marie would have? It somehow didn't make her feel any better. She wouldn't be satisfied until she saw his broken body dead at her feet but as she was now there was no chance of trying to take him or his organization down. "For everyone else's sake, I hope you are right. But I suppose you would be the one who would know."

As Marie managed to find it in herself to smile Squigly frowns with a furrowed brow, the two girls were complete opposites in that instant. Now that Umbrella was safe the young Contiello survivor had one last mission, a mission that Marie was already well aware of...

Fast forward ahead the Player is seen walking alone with Umbrella in his arms down the path that lead to downtown Meridian. He had bags under his eyes and was barely keeping himself up, it was a long and eventful day. The only thing he wanted to do now was find a nice bed to lay down on so that he could pass out and enjoy a good night's rest.

"...Sis." Umbrella mummers in her sleep.

After hearing her the Player looks down and huffs. "Heh...You're such a handful." He said to her despite knowing that she was out cold.
A few more steps and the Player stops walking. The sound of motorcycle engines are heard in the
distance and they got louder with each passing second, it wasn't long before a horde of bikers
dressed in all black became apparent. He squints his eyes to try and make out the figures riding on
the bikes and as they drew closer the figure of a certain redhead became particularly noticeable.

The Egret platoon followed the speeding lead of Parasoul who was able to catch sight of the Player
who had Umbrella in tow. Seeing her sister being completely still in his arms struck the princess with
a bit of concern. Her heart racing with anxiousness. The eldest Renoir came to a powersliding halt, the
tires of her bike screeching loudly against the road.

Parasoul jumps off of her bike, not bothering to put down the kickstand thus having her motorcycle
fall over. She rushes over to the Player to check on her sister. "...U-Umbrella?"

"Don't worry. She's gonna be just fine. She's just resting." The Player smiles at Parasoul to ensure
she had nothing to worry about.

Parasoul was on the verge of tearing up but her cool demeanor prevented her from expressing her
true joy. "You...did it. You actually did it."

"Of course. I told you I'd get her back and that's just what I did. You didn't doubt me, did ya?" He
asked while nudging his arms up, prompting Parasoul to take her sister.

She could only stare at him with a shimmering eye unable to find enough words in her vocabulary to
thank him for all that he's done. She takes Umbrella into her arms and held her close to her heart,
kissing her sisters forehead and nuzzling her cheek into her affectionately. She closed her eyes and

"Thank you..." Said Parasoul in a weak voice. "Thank you, thank you, thank you."

The Player rubs the back of his neck shyly and flags his hand. "Aaaw, cut it out. I'm not used to

 Umbrella fidgets in her sister's arms which caught the attention of the princess whom crouches down
to lay her down while still holding her head up. The Egret who specialized in medical treatment
came to inspect the youngest Renoir.

"...Are you okay, Umbrella?" Parasoul asked in a soft and concerned voice.

Umbrella moves her head to the side, her cheek resting on her sisters bosom. "C'mon...get...cereal..."

The Player shakes his head and laughs. Parasoul lets out a sigh of relief and once again holds
Umbrella close. Seeing the sisters reunited rewarded the Player with the feeling of a comforting
warmth from within. He takes off without a word, back in the direction he was coming from, leaving
the sisters to enjoy their moment.

After walking a fair enough distance he stops again and looks over to one of the many trees that
surrounded the area. "You can come out now."

Filia and Squigly come from behind the tree he was looking at and Filia moves over to him.

"That was fast. So they're finally reunited?" Filia asked.

"Yep. I didn't stick around. I wanted them to have enough time to bask in their reunion. I'm sure

that's all they want right now."
"That was thoughtful. I'm really happy we were able to pull through. Mission accomplished!"

"Yeah. Mission accomplished."

Filia fist bumps the air and the Player laughs at her celebratory gesture. Squigly and Leviathan look to one another and smile happily for the duo, Samson continued to act less than impressed and huffs.

"Yeah, yeah. Whatever." Samson budges in to cut their celebrations short, looking tired which made Filia appear as if she had messy hair. "Now that we're done can we finally go back to our crappy hotel? I'm tired as all hell."

The Player stretched his arms out and exhaled loudly afterward, showing his own weary state. "I can definitely agree with you on that, rug mug."

"You're so lucky I'm too tired to strangle you."

"Uh huh, whatever you say. C'mon, Filia." The Player motions his hand for her to follow along. "Let's get going."

Filia grabs his wrist as he took the first couple of steps to stop him. "Hold on." She says before looking back to Squigly and Leviathan. "Squigly, what're you going to do?"

"Huh?" She questions.

"Good question. I was only here because of the new Skullgirl but as per request of the Player I- well, you already know about that. With Marie alive I'm not sure what to do. Leviathan and I are just a memory living in the present now."

The Player looks back to her and turns to face them. "Right and I'm truly grateful to you for everything you've done for us, including that little request I asked of you back there, but use that to your advantage. You're alive so live a little. Go catch up on the times: watch a movie, go see a show, travel, eat, just enjoy the time you have. Life's no fun if you're forced to live one way without having the opportunity to have fun along the way."

Actually hearing him out proved to be a bit insightful for the pair, even Filia agreed with a happy nod of the head. Though Squigly and Leviathan were only around to see the rise of one Skullgirl this was an opportunity for them to see the new world and how much things have changed and considering the Player's involvement and his relationship with the Skullgirl, which helped provide a new light on how they saw things, it was something to really think about.

"Heh. You raise a fine point." Leviathan replied with a concurring smile. "Mi'lady, surely you would enjoy your free will beyond just hunting the Skullgirl."

"Of course!" She says with a perky tone having already been in agreement to the idea. "Just think of all the wonderful things we missed out on. We slept through 14 years of our lives, I would love nothing more than to experience a small piece of what we've missed. Not only that...I was hoping to get to know Filia and the Player more."

"You do?" The previously mentioned pair ask at the same time.

"More than anything. Your bond with one another has truly been a case of wonder for me and the things that I've learned, Heart Syncing was it? I want to further examine this phenomenon and see the extent of what it's capable of and, if it's alright, have the chance to experience it myself. I don't
really have many friends."

The Player crosses his arms and thinks for a moment. "Hell even I'd like to know more about it. I
was initially against the idea of having these abilities but now I feel like a god after what I seen
Samson do. Marie did say I could Heart Sync with up to three people so if I can find a way to do that
with you that'd be great. I'd have two right there."

"And if you take Cerebella into consideration that's an easy third."

"Boom, perfect." He smirks. "Well now that we've got that cleared up, I can't wait to work with you
Squigly. Now! Let's get going, Filia."

The Player faces the other direction and marches on but Filia grabs onto him and pulls him back.
"Wait. Squigly, Leviathan, where are you guys staying?"

That was a good question, which they didn't have an answer for. "We don't know yet." Squigly
replied. "We don't exactly have a home, we sleep in a coffin since I died but I think that was
destroyed when the Skullgirl rose. That's when I met the Player."

"Oh right. You nearly ruined my back with that butt." He says while looking over his shoulder.

"Heheh..." She bashfully covered her smile with her large sleeve.

"Well we can't have you sleeping in a coffin." Said Filia. "You can come live with us!"

"We can?" Squigly and Leviathan asked.

"They can?" The Player and Samson asked at the same time.

"Of course! It'll be great, the three of us living together and learning more about each other, it'll be
like one big sleepover! Plus it'll be good for Leviathan and Samson to catch up."

"We'd hate to intrude." Leviathan says but still very grateful for the offer.

Filia walks up to them and grabs Squigly's hand. "Nonsense! We're always willing to help out a
friend in need. Right, Player?"

"But-"

Before he could even reply Filia was already pulling Squigly along. "This is going to be so great!
You've got to tell me how you can speak without using your mouth! And how Leviathan can breath
fire! And what Samson was like in the past!"

While being dragged off Squigly. Leviathan and even Samson tried to speak but Filia's barrage of
questions just wouldn't allow for them to have a chance to get a word in.

The Player held his hand up to her as she passed him to try and talk her into a stand still but to no
avail. "Wait! But I can't-! I don't have the money for-! ....Goddamnit."

He sluggishly follows behind the group knowing it was pointless to try and argue at this point.

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A/N: Aaaah, it always feels good getting a chapter out after being away for long periods of
time and I don't know how to properly explain the sensation other than it feels good but with
that said I'm happy I was able to get it done without breaking it up into another chapter.
So when I was writing this the technique Heart Sync was originally called "Bond Sync" but I ended up changing it to sound like something more suitable for the Skullgirls universe rather than something generic... or at least something less generic lol. Initially the scene involving the abilities debut played out differently, rather than Filia being the only one to receive it Squigly was also going to get access to it but while writing I felt it wouldn't have made any sense since Squigly and the Player just recently met. I wanted Heart Sync to be something that only works when the Player actually gets to truly know or understand someone and to have the feeling mutual with the other party and since Filia was the first person of the Skullgirls cast he befriends it only made sense she and Samson got to be the first ones to demonstrate the ability.

He was also going to Heart Sync on his own instead of receiving guidance from Marie, he did this by thinking of all the friends he's made(Parasoul, Cerebella, Umbrella etc) and how he wanted to keep himself from repeating that cowardice he's displayed with Filia and Cerebella since Double taunted him about it while she was fighting Filia and Squigly, speaking of which that fight was supposed to last longer with Double constantly having the upper hand on the girls but I decided to have them shine since things were more dire. I have the original for anybody who cares to read how that went:

"I'm not going to let my friends fight alone anymore. I made that mistake with Filia and Cerebella but I won't repeat myself here."

'Despite it all I still believe our greatest chance at stopping the Skull Heart lies with you. The bonds you're able to create are the key, never forget that. Destroy the threads of fate. Save everyone from their sorrow. Free them from this curse that plagues our world, including me – please.'

Thinking back the Player was beginning to understand the meaning of Marie's words. The Skullgirls plea had only reminded him of the helplessness he felt at every turn when his loved ones needed him most, thoughts of Filia, Samson, Cerebella, Parasoul, Umbrella, Squigly and Leviathan ran through his mind and fueled him with an exhilarating rush.

At the same time Filia and Squigly were undergoing a similar process, they were able to feel his enlightened spirit and ultimately the desire to be there for one another resulting in the trio unifying in a unique way. Double and Marie sensed a growing change in the group and watched as newly formed sparks spiraled around Filia and Squigly.

"Double...I'm not going to let you intimidate me anymore because nothing you do will ever scare me more than the thought of losing the people I care about to people like you. We're going to stop you and we're going to save Umbrella."

Double grit her teeth at the Player, each word seemed to power up the intensity of the sparks circling around the girls until finally a glowing aura formed around them, dark purple for Filia and a magenta color for Squigly.

"Filia! Squigly! Do whatever it takes to end this! We're leaving with Umbrella!"

An overwhelming surge of power swallowed the girls whole making their auras erupt fiercely with only the sound of a thunderous boom complimenting their newfound power. In the eyes of Double she watched the spiritual silhouette's of Filia and Squigly fuse with the Player which would then go on to manifest their merged aura into the shape of a skull.

"HYAAAAAAHYYYYYHHH!" Both Filia and Squigly roared in uncontrollable power lust.
Didn't have the entire scenario because I ended up making a mistake and deleting it but I saved what little I could lol. The Heart Sync ability itself was inspired by the Ash-Greninja transformation from the Pokémon X and Y anime, if any of you watched it then you already know what I'm talking about. To get myself in gear for writing I listened to the 'Satoshi-Gekkouga Pays a Visit' track from the Japanese soundtrack of the 19th movie over and over again XD

I'm still trying to think of a way to really balance the technique so it doesn't be too rewarding since it's basically like going Super Saiyan and will have different variants to it. From what was written so far the perks are an immense increase in power, speed and durability while also having the user able to access their strongest attack, which in Skullgirls is the Level 3 Blockbuster which both Cerebella and Filia already demonstrated, but the only drawback is a short time limit and incredible fatigue for the Player and whoever he is syncing with. I plan on having it so that the more people he syncs with simultaneously the weaker their actual power will be while still granting them some nice perks like in the game where when you use more characters their damage is nerfed but with one character they'll do a lot more damage vs a team of 3.
Normal Lives

Following the recent events of Marie's rampage against Lorenzo and his organization - things around New Meridian had finally begun to settle down, and with the Skullgirl missing Meridian was finally able to find peace.

The downtown area of New Meridian was now closed off to the public for reconstruction and investigation. Princess Parasoul had the Black Egrets searching high and low for Marie and Valentine, as well as any of their associates, but there had been no sightings since the incident.

Umbrella was able to make a full recovery and has been undergoing special training from her sister at a discreet location far from civilization. Ever since the incident Parasoul has become quite protective of her sister but it was never to an unbearable point for the youngest Renoir. In fact their time together has brought them closer together.

Squigly and Leviathan moved in with Filia, Samson and the Player, as per request of Filia, and the trio spent their days building upon their partnership, for Leviathan and Samson it was only a matter of catching up.

A few weeks have passed since the Skullgirls incident and peace once again descends upon the sprawling Canopy Kingdom.

On a Monday morning Filia and the Player are seen together by a shallow riverbank away from the city. Filia stood barefoot in the ankle length water while the Player oversaw her on land with her hat, thigh high leggings and shoes by his side.

Filia was concentrating in silence almost as if she was meditating. "…." She took in a deep breath and let out an extensive exhale.

"MmmMmmMmmMmm. MmmMmmMmm." The Player hummed on the side which became increasingly more distracting.

"...Ngh." Filia nudges her mouth from hearing him to try and gesture him to keep silent.

"Just keep concentrating, Filia." Samson said in the midst of trying to keep his cool and focus.

"I'm trying but..."

"HmmmmmmmmmmMmmmmMmmmmMmmmm." He began taping his foot making the grass crunch underneath his shoe. He wasn't making the area any more peaceful.

It soon got to a point where Filia and Samson broke their concentration and acknowledged the Player for his disruptions. "Player!" Filia called out only to see him not even paying them no mind.

The Player had his eyes closed and was motioning his body as if he was dancing. This is further evident as he had a pair of headphones on which was playing a song loud enough to be heard from outside the ear muffs.

"Is he dancing?" Samson asked.

"Uugh." Filia rolled her eyes and walks over to him with wet feet. She stood behind him with her hands on her hips. "Player!"
He couldn't possibly hear her with how loud the music was playing. He kept dancing unaware of her presence. "MmmmmMmmmm. Mmmm! You'll never see it comiiiiiiiiiing!" He suddenly broke out into song which made Filia flinch.

"HEY!" Filia shouts a bit louder.

"You'll see that my mind is too fast for eyes! You're done in! By the time it hits you: Your last surprise! Ooooooh!"

She sighs and reaches her hand out to tap his shoulder. Feeling her touch he opened his eyes and looked over his shoulder to see Filia standing before him. He pulled the headphones down so that they were around his neck. "Oh, hey. You done?"

"Done?" She asked with her hands back on her hips. "I couldn't concentrate with your singing."

"Oops... I was singing that loud? Sorry about that." He smiled innocently at her before looking down to his headphones.

Filia couldn't even be mad or upset with him, seeing his smile made her give one in return before giggling at his carefree response. "You're supposed to be teaching me."

"I'm learning just as much as you. It's still a new experience for me too, but let's give it a go. No distractions."

"Right!" She clenched her fist enthusiastically and ran back to the river while the Player got closer to the banks edge.

The Player takes a deep breath and closes his eyes with Filia and Samson unknowingly following his exact lead. "Now... Relax. Clear your thoughts." He speaks out calmly to her.

"Right."

"Good. Purify your mind. At this very moment the world is zoned out and you're free of worry."

The sound of the elements surrounding Filia began to fade, the constant flowing of the river moving downstream, the leaves in trees rustling from the gentle stroke of the breeze, everything went silent. There was even a point where the feeling of water brushing past her ankles became void. The area around her was completely blank, the only thing she could feel was the Player's presence and vice versa for Samson.

"...Aah. There. I can feel you. Our minds are in sync. Now think back to our first meeting and everything leading up to now. Without words, ask yourself, what have you gained from our meeting? What is it that you want most? I'll do the same." The Player asked Filia.

Initially Filia felt the answer would've been simple to answer but as she tried thinking it was more complex than she originally thought. Interestingly enough the Player was able to feel her hesitation but remained silent so she could find the answer.

When she first began her journey the only thing she could remember was an intense fear for the unknown, the world she once knew was a complete mystery and the only thing she could remember was a faint piece of memory in the form of Carol, whom she felt an intense guilt for. The journey took an emotional toll on the young amnesiac and she found herself turning to a power much greater than herself: the Skull Heart.

With a goal in mind she made it her mission to hunt down the artifact and wish back her memory in
In order to make amends for her actions to Carol and remember who she was, but a fateful encounter with the Player has took her down a path of enlightenment. She found meaning in herself despite the loss of memory and realized how much she's gained to the point of realizing that dwelling on a guilty past couldn't give her a happy future, especially if she had to become a monster in the process, a fate she felt the Player, and all her friends, saved her from.

With her consciousness cleared and a firm belief in fighting for a new future she can share with those she cares for, including her reunion with Carol, Filia finds her answer with a smile. They didn't share a word but at that very moment something clicked between them. The violet aura veil surrounded Filia in a blaze of glory, the water surrounding her breaks apart so that she was standing in a small circle of dry land. Feeling this sudden spike in power Filia opens her eyes and looks down to her palms in shock.

"Whoa...! What is-"

"There we go! You did it." The Player applauded her for finding the answer.

"I did? But this feels insane..."

"Don't you remember? You used that power to beat the creepy nun lady. Once we realize how much we need one another our hearts become connected. People rely on the Skull Heart's power out of greed and in turn they are overcome with corruption but for you and I we rely on each other. It's because of that we don't need to depend anything else but the strength we create for each other."

"I think I understand. It's funny because when I was alone I thought the Skull Heart was my only choice. The only chance I would have to make things right but meeting you made me see otherwise."

He nods in understanding. "When I first came here all I cared about was getting my way. I didn't think of anything else but my desires. I was selfish but then I realized the bigger picture and what's at risk. You helped me embrace that and this part I play."

Filia looks over to him with a silent stare, her aura remained calm with a gentle flow in contrast to its violent eruption against Double.

The Player looks up to the sky and shrugs. "I guess it can't be helped, I said I wouldn't fall in line to the whole hero thing but at the end of the day I'm proud of myself. I got pass my own greed and realized my power came from you." He placed his hands in his jean pockets and looked over to Filia, returning the glare. "Thank you for helping me see that. Your power is incredible."

Once their eyes met Filia stood with a soft gasp but felt a great deal of achievement. Her aura drops but unlike before she wasn't overcome with fatigue, something she nor the Player realized. The water returned to its natural state, flowing by her ankles.

"No." She shook her head to dismiss his previous statement. "It's OUR power. Our power is incredible!"

"Uuuuuugh! Will you two stop? This is just awful!" Samson groaned.

"What? You jealous or something?" The Player teased.

"Hell no! You think anybody wants to hear that friendship nonsense?"

The Player shrugged. "I would think so because they're still reading."

"What?" Both Filia and Samson asked.
"Nothing. Well, anyway, I gotta head off to work so we should start heading back."

Filia steps out of the river to get her things. "I've been meaning to ask about that. How are you liking the new job?"

"It's fine. Whatever puts bread on the table, right? Though I'd rather be working as an Egret. I know Parasoul is far too busy to see my personal training so being a badass will have to wait."

"Hmph. Knowing you I wouldn't be surprised if you chickened out. As if you would be able to handle strict combat practices." Samson remarked.

"The first thing I'm gonna do once I become a soldier is snatch you off of Filia's head."

"B-But that'd hurt!" Filia timidly responds as she got the image of the Player tugging on Samson which was basically just pulling her hair.

"True, true. I'll find some way to put Nappy Longstocking in his place."

"You'll die trying, ki-!"

Samson's retort was cut short as the Player placed Filia's hat onto her head leaving him to muffle aggressively.

"Shaddup." The Player smirked. "Are you going to be alright walking back by yourself?"

Once he removed his hand Filia adjusted the hat on her head so that it was comfortable for Samson. "I'll be fine, don't worry about me. You just get moving, I don't want you to be late. Squigly, Leviathan, Samson and I will be waiting for you. Be safe."

"Always." He nods at her with a smile.

Back at their hotel Squigly sat by the window in complete boredom. She was forced to watch as the beautiful morning passed her by.

"It's not fair." She sighs while resting her cheek in her palm. "I wish we could've went with them."

"I feel the same way." Leviathan concurred. "But the Player wants us hidden and I suppose for good reason."

"For good reason? Are you talking about the other day?" She asks while looking out the corner of her narrowed eye to the Parasite.

Leviathan didn't want this kind of attention on himself but now that he was in this position he was going to have explain himself.

"Well..."

**The other day...**

Not too long ago the Player, Filia and Squigly went out for dinner at one of the local diners in New Meridian.

Samson wasn't under the pressure of a hat but was forced into a permanent grin with his eyes closed to make it appear as if he was nothing more than a headband. This expressional freeze took its toll over long periods of time, as his cheeks ended up cramping, but in order to get food in his system he kept the act going. Leviathan was tucked away inside Squigly's head so his presence was completely
hidden. The Player sat across the table from the two girls.

Since they arrived the three friends were being glared at intensely by the other customers thanks to Squigly. It was an awkward situation that made them feel uncomfortable.

"Why is everyone looking at us like that...?" Filia whispered while trying to read over the menu.

"Nothing about us being here is normal. I think they're afraid of Sienna." The Player whispered over to her.

"Afraid of me? What for?" Squigly asked with concern in her voice.

The Player sat his menu down and raised a brow at her question. "You mean other than the fact that you've been talking without using your mouth? You're a zombie."

"Surely we can find better a classification for my condition. Zombies are soulless corpses with mindless intent. In case you didn't realize I have soul." She says this with a smug smile, referring to her innate ability to sing with a burning passion. The last few lines of her statement was even partially sung to prove her point and it was beautifully delivered.

"That's a pretty nice way to put it, Sienna. But right now I just want to eat." The Player replied, now leaning back in his seat.

While they were talking one of the waitresses was seen fighting against her fellow employees in the background. They were forcefully pushing her toward their booth but despite her best efforts she was no match for the power of two.

Once she was within their space the trio noticed the waitress, but ultimately missed the part where it was against her will, and faced her. She was trembling uncontrollably while trying to maintain a friendly smile to keep up appearances for the sake of the restaurant but fear was obviously a factor here.

"W-W-W-Welcome to... uh, Meridian Goodness. I-I'll be your waitress for the evening... M-M-May I take your order...?" She had her pencil aimed at the small notepad but her hands were out of control with the shaking.

The Player looks back down to the menu to find the section he was interested in. "Uuuuh, yes, I'll have the Meridian special. For a drink I'll just have a glass of water and that's it for me."

"I'd like a cheeseburger with fries and a milkshake, please." Filia requested without the need of a menu.

"M-Mhm." The waitress wrote down their orders and finally turned to Squigly. "And you?"

Once she faced Squigly the waitress was greeted to the young Contiello holding out her arms and assumed a lifeless guise - her mouth left open to reveal, just beyond her stitches, long strings of thick saliva draping from the roof of her mouth.

"BRRAAAAIIIIINNSSSSSS..." She groaned playfully after making her best impersonation of a zombie.

Horrified screams filled the establishment which was only complimented by the exaggerated reactions from the customers. Everyone left their food and the staff jumped over the counter to make a run for the exit, the entire restaurant was empty in a matter of seconds leaving the trio to sit in silence.
Squigly blinks sporadically and Leviathan popped out of her head to see the empty building.

"… So, uh, ramen on the stove?" The Player asked the group.

"Looks like it." Filia was left humorously sobbing on the table.

**At the present...**

"Come now, Leviathan. Surely there was no harm in a little fun." Squigly crossed her arms and pouts adorably with her head held up.

"O-Of course not!" He replied with a supportive smile but in actuality he did believe there was a time and place for everything, but all in all there was no harm in Squigly just having a bit of fun, something she hasn't had the opportunity to do in the last 14 years.

Squigly opens her eye to see his smile and found herself giggling almost immediately before petting the side of his face. "Oh, Leviathan, you're so cute! I can't stay pouty at you."

Leviathan snickers in delight while Squigly caressed his cheek making the Parasite coil around his host affectionately. The sound of the front door opening got the duo's attention. Filia entered the front room shortly after, removing her hat for Samson.

"Gah! It really sucks being under that thing!" Samson complained.

"I'm sorry Samson, I guess this one isn't as comfortable as the last one. Next time I'll pick a better one."

Samson extended his arms out and grabbed onto Filia's cheeks, much to the latter's dismay, and pulled on them while kicking his feet mimicking a minor tantrum. "I already told you I hated that thing!"

"But the price was right!" She tried explaining but it didn't seem to influence Samson's actions.

Seeing their quarrel made Squigly laugh. "You two are like oil and vinegar."

"At this point I'm beginning to feel sorry for Filia." Leviathan said upon observation.

Samson retracted his limbs and returned to appearing as regular hair. "Can it, worm."

"So, Filia, how'd it go?" Squigly asked.

After rubbing her cheeks Filia looks over to Squigly with a positive smile. "It was great! We're still trying to get the hang of things but I think we made some nice progress today."

"Splendid! Tell me, what does it feel like?"

"It's... Huh. I'm not sure I know how to describe it. Um... It feels really empowering. Like I just get hit with this surge of energy that makes me feel powerful. I've never felt anything like it."

"Aaaaw. Wish we could try it. Maybe the Player doesn't trust us enough."

"No, no. Don't think like that." Filia fanned her hand dismissively at the idea.

"It's possible." She continued. "But no harm done. Besides it would make sense he practices with you the most, you two are good friends. Still, I do wish he'd give me a chance. I can prove I'm a good and reliable partner."
Filia slightly tilts her head to the side. "Huh?"

"Hear me out: You know how he wants us to stay inside because of our Parasites?"

"He wants YOU to stay in here." Samson corrected.

Squigly and Leviathan narrowed their eyes at Samson but decided to pay him no mind. "So you know how he wants US to stay inside because our Parasites? I was thinking of finding a place to work so that we could help with paying rent and getting food."

"You know I was actually thinking the same thing. Wouldn't it be great if we all could work at the same place?"

"Yeah! That would be great! Leviathan, what do you think?"

"I'm all for it." He answered. "It's the least we could do for all that he's done for us thus far. If he works too hard he'll end up driving himself to the ground."

"Samson?" Filia asked.

"I honestly don't care." He had no enthusiasm whatsoever.

"That's Samson speak for 'Of course' so I guess we have our answer!"

Squigly grins happily at the positive responses and nearly jumped for joy at the idea of actually doing something other than stay inside. "So where does he work?"

One transition later

"Welcome to Beefy Royalty. May I take your order?" The Player asked as the next customer in line approached the counter.

Beefy Royalty is a well known fast food restaurant chain established throughout the Canopy Kingdom, and the neighboring lands including the Chess Kingdom. The business shared a competitive market with rivals WacArnold's, Taco Spell, Marvee's, Penny's and so on.

After taking the order of the last customer and giving them their change the Player closed the register and waited for the next person. It was a pretty slow morning so there weren't many customers. One of his fellow employees, who was working the register next to him, noticed how sluggish he was and had shown concern.

"Hey, you doing ok?" She asked.

"Hm?" The Player looks over to her after rubbing between his eyes.

"You don't seem like yourself today. Like you didn't get any sleep."

"Nah, I'm fine. I just... had a busy morning. I'll manage. Why? You worried about me, Feng?"

Feng was a peculiar young lady, her most distinguishable trait was her hair which had two tones, white and black. Her bangs were white while the rest of her hair was black. She had two enigmatic birds perched on her head, they actually looked like some form of head accessory which one could immediately assume upon seeing them, and they had two long feathers attached to them, matching her hair, one was white and the other was black.

"No. I was just asking." She replied with a teasing expression. "You were almost late again too. You
"keep slipping and you'll end up getting fired."

"Me? Fired? I'm not gonna get fired. You have nothing to worry about, trust me. I appreciate all the concern though."

"Heh, I never said I was worried but I'm glad to see you can toughen it out. An it looks like we've got more customers so back to work we go." Her bright smile had a way of putting a pep in the Player's step.

The Player faced the customers in line. "Welcome to Beefy Royalty. May I take your-

"Hi Player!" Both Filia and Squigly greeted him.

"OH MY GOD!" He exclaimed while backing into the soda dispenser machine stationed behind him. Feng flinched at his sudden outburst and looks over to him.

"What's wrong?" Feng asked.

"Nothing! Nothing at all. Um, I'm gonna go on break. Take care of things for me here."

"Break? But you just got here."

"Thanks for understanding!"

He jumped over the counter in a hurry and grabbed his friends by the wrist, dragging them off to the side door which lead to the parking lot. Seeing him act so strange only caused Feng to feel worried again, not only that but he caused a scene for the other employees and customers as well.

"Where's the fire?" Filia asked while holding her hat down on her head with one hand.

"What are you two doing here? You shouldn't be outside."

"We wanted to get jobs to help pay for rent. We thought it'd be nice if the three of us could work together." Squigly explained.

"No!"

"How come?"

"Because it's not safe for you two to be out in public with your Parasites. I don't want you two getting executed in case something goes down. Do you know how bitchy Samson is?"

Hearing this Samson raised the hat off of his face. "You trying go right now?!"

The Player quickly threw his hand down onto the hat to keep Samson down but he was still aggressively resisting. "See? The slightest upset and he's out of control!"

"Nnngh! I'm trying to get better control over him." Filia spoke up while her head was being jerked around by the two boys fighting for dominance against the other.

The Player looks over to Squigly. "Speaking of Parasites, where's Leviathan?"

Popping out of Squigly's empty eye socket, which was concealed by her large bang, Leviathan appeared with an adorable smile. "You called?"

"Gah!" The Player jumped at his sudden appearance. "...You're in her head? Like your entire
"Leviathan can stay safely tucked away in there while I'm in public. That way I can put in my other pigtail to cover up the hole. See?" Squigly grabbed onto her left pigtail and pulled on it to show what she meant, it popped off and revealed the hole Leviathan usually occupied when out.

After she put the pigtail back, which was basically being used as a prop at this point, the Player acknowledged their convincing cover up.

"Ok but that doesn't really excuse everything else. Your whole state of being isn't normal."

"I beg your pardon!" She placed her hands on her hips with an unamused glare.

"I didn't mean it in an offensive way. I'm talking about the stitches on your mouth, the missing eye, the hole in your head and back, the blue skin. Not to mention your left arm is mostly skeleton. People are going to notice those things."

Though she didn't want to admit it the Player did raise a good point. "They won't be able to see the holes. The pigtail covers the hole in my head and my bang covers the eye. Also my sleeves cover my arm. As for my back maybe I can wear a shirt that will cover it up."

"Ladies, I appreciate what you're trying to do but we need to stick to what we've had going for the last few weeks. It's safer."

"What are you doing out here?" A male voice from behind the Player asked.

The Player knew who the voice belonged to and turned around to face him. "Hey, boss. Sorry. I was just..."

"We've got customers in there. Feng can't handle her work and yours." He then noticed Squigly and Filia behind the Player. "Who are these two?"

"Oh! These guys are my friends, I had to discuss a rather important matter to them."

The boss couldn't help but wonder what was with Squigly considering her blue skin and stitched mouth. His apparent staring made the Player and Filia worry about how he'd react to her appearance.

"Why is her mouth stitched shut?" He points his thumb toward Squigly while looking at the Player. "And why is she blue?"

The Player wrapped one arm around Squigly's shoulder and used the other to point a finger at her. "H-Her? This is... um, it's her Halloween costume! Yeah!"

"Halloween costume?" His boss questioned.

"Mhm! It's autumn sir and Halloween is approaching really fast. She has really taken a liking to her outfit and can't help but wear it. 24/7..."

"Of course. How could I forget Halloween? It's one of the Kingdom's most anticipated events."

"Ya don't say..." The Player replied with disinterest in tone. He placed both hands on Squigly and Filia and pushed them forward. "Anyway they were just leaving, sooo, bye."

"Hold up, Player. I'm interested in keeping your friend around."

"WHAT?!" He exclaimed.
"Yeah. I've never seen a costume so life like. It's so real I can hardly believe it. She can work as BR's mascot for the holiday, I think that'll really draw in some customers. Our rivals have their own mascots so it's time we finally step up to the plate."

"Sir, I really don't think-"

The boss was done paying any attention to the Player now that his mind was set. "Hey there, sweetie. How would you like to work as a mascot?"

Squigly grins and clapped her hands together. "That sounds lovely! What would I have to do?"

"It's easy, just stand outside and do your best to draw in more customers. We'll advertise it as the 'Halloween Special', to really get folks in the spirit."

"Sounds like fun. When do I start?"

"When are you available?"

"I can start today. Nothing is going on for me back at home so jumping right into it is perfect."

The boss smiled brightly at Squigly. "Excellent, excellent. I like your enthusiasm. We could always use that energy on board."

Seeing the opportune moment to jump in Filia steps forward with hopeful eyes. "Could I have a job as well? I can start today."

"You too? Wow. I've never met people so willing to work a fast food joint. I can't possibly say no to such a cute face, you can work the register with Feng."

Filia raised her fist into the air and let out a victorious "Yay!" in the cutest way possible but this news wasn't good for the Player.

"But I work the register with Feng." He mentioned to his boss. "What am I supposed to do now?"

A few minutes later

The Player was cleaning the bathroom. He displayed his annoyance with a bitter look on his face while mopping the floor.

"This is so stupid. Who gets hired on the first day without having to fill out an application in this day and age? I swear it's only because the boss is a creep." He dipped the mop into the water and went back to cleaning in a sulking fit. "Still, it'll be nice to have some extra money come in. As long as they don't draw too much attention everything should be fine. Looks like I'm done here, better go dump this mop water outside."

Once the floor was mopped he took the bucket by the handle and left the restroom. Not too long after he left one of the toilet's was flushed and out came one of the customers, his boots were dirty and tracked mud along the once clean floor as he made his way over to the sink.

"...Weirdo." The man plainly said to himself aloud while washing his hands.

The Player made his way back to the main lobby only to discover the place was booming with business Filia and Feng were stacked with taking orders.

"What in the world? How did this place get so packed? I was only cleaning the bathroom for like ten or fifteen minutes." He noticed his boss jotting down information on a clipboard, most likely tending
to the statistics of business. He approached with the mop and bucket still in hand. "Yo, boss. What's up?"

"Player, we're making a killing! I'm at a loss of words for how well we're doing on a Monday."

"Yeah, I guess but most of them are teenagers from the look of it. Shouldn't they be getting to school?"

"Hell if I know. Could be a holiday."

"Hm. Or perhaps there's something on the breakfast menu everybody is crazy about."

Two passing teens with their orders on a tray walk by the Player and his boss. "Yo, did you see the new girl outside?" The first teen asked.

"Of course! They got cosplayers working at Beefy's now. That's so hot! Not to mention the blue girl outside got a crazy nice ass on her."

"Right?! I'm gonna see if I can get her number. Kind of weird her mouth is all... realistically stitched, how is she supposed to give good head?"

"Might just be part of the costume, bro."

"True, true. She's so hot! I just wanna-"

The Player and his boss overheard the boys, the former of the two shook his head. "Of course." The Player sighed.

"See? I told you getting that girl on board would be a good idea. Now all we do is sit back and let the money flow through."

The boss wrote down the last of his notes and gleefully made his way to the office. The Player on the other hand was still skeptical about the situation, he looks over to the front entrance to see Squigly surrounded by enthusiastic customers, the look on her face hinted at joy for drawing so much attention for the establishment. He sighs and goes to empty the bucket water in the parking lot.

Filia could tell there was something on her friend's mind as he walked through the lobby not quite looking like himself.

"So, you're friends with 'Player', huh?" Feng asked in hopes of breaking the ice between herself and Filia.

"Huh?" There was a slight delay in Filia's response, obviously lost in thought.

Feng continued smiling casually to further invoke her friendly nature. "You and the 'Player'. You're friends? The way he was acting when you first came in suggested that."

"Oh! Yeah. He's a good friend." Filia answered with a cheery smile that rivaled Feng's.

The cap Filia was wearing started to twitch. "Speak for yourself." Samson uttered. Filia reacted by slapping the top of her head. "Ack!"

"Eh?" Feng slightly tilted her head in confusion.

"My head was itching! Hehehe. But as I was saying – he's a good friend of mine. I don't know what I'd do without him."
"Aaaaaw, I see. He your boyfriend or something?" She teased with a sly smirk and narrowed eyes.

"Ha!" Samson mockingly laughed. Filia now slammed her fist on top of her head. "NGH!"

Filia was forced to fake a cough in order to cover-up Samson's outburst. Feng wasn't really able to follow with Filia's seemingly random outbursts but gave her the benefit of the doubt that something seemed off.

"You feeling ok?"

"Y-Yeah. Just an annoying cough, not sure where it came from." Her smile slowly turned to a more nervous expression.

Feng then pointed to her tilted BR's cap. "And your head?"

"I forgot to shampoo." She regretfully lied as she properly adjusted the cap back on her head. "But no, we're not like that." She respectfully answered her lingering question with a casual look.

Feng laughed after handing a customer his order, receipt and change. "Don't worry, I'm just messing with you. I figure it'd be a nice way to break the ice and introduce myself. Speaking of which, I'm Feng by the way."

"Nice to meet you! My name is Filia. Wow, first day on the job and I'm already making friends!"

"Heh. I like your attitude. So, what about that other girl? The one that likes dressing up?"

"Dress up?" Filia questioned before realizing they were supposed to keep Squigly's condition underwraps. "OH! Right! Of course, dress up. Yes, she's a friend of ours too."

"And her name was... Squigly, if I'm remembering correctly?"

"Yep! Or at least that's what she likes to go by. Her real name is Sienna Contiello."

"Sienna Contiello, hm? Strange."

"Something wrong?"

"No, no. It's just... I could've sworn I've heard that name somewhere before. Or at least I think I have. Darn it, now I'm having trouble remembering." She crossed her arms in an attempt to think on it but nothing came to mind. She shrugs it off and looks back up to Filia. "Oh well. Guess I must've imagined it."

"I'm sure it's nothing to worry about." Filia assured.

"Yeah. I'm sure you're right, I don't even know where it came from. With all that randomness aside though, if you ever need anything let me know. I'd be happy to help out."

Filia nods. "I certainly will, Feng. Thank you!" Just then the Player re-entered the lobby. She watched and noticed his expression from earlier hadn't changed. "...Actually. Could I ask you something?"

"Sure. What's up?"

"Has the Player been acting strange lately?"

"Strange? Hm. Well I'm not sure I can really say, I've only known him for a little while now but in
the time we've spent working together he made it clear he's a pretty cool guy with a playfulness to him. I've always known him to be a cheerful pranker but as of late he's seemed tired."

"Tired?"

"Yeah. Lately he's been running late and just looks exhausted when it comes time for work. That's about all I've really noticed."

Exhaustion was usually the price for Heart Syncing and considering how often he wanted to practice with Filia being tired throughout the day was a given, not to mention all that's been happening with Marie and now that Squigly shares a roof with them he put himself into overdrive in order to keep them afloat.

Filia's eyes paced back and forth for a second only to close them before sighing. "I see."

"Is something the matter?" Feng asked.

"No. Everything is fine." She quickly perked up and shook her head. "Sorry about that. Guess I was just lost in thought. We should get back to work!" Her perky attitude seemed to contradict her look of worry, which obviously didn't fool Feng but not wanting to overstep her boundaries she played along accepted Filia's gesture.

"You're right. We'll be at it all day if Squigly keeps attracting all these customers."

"Tell me about it. Next customer in line, please!" Filia called out with a wave to those waiting in one of the other two lines beside her and Feng's station.

The morning rush was a busy one thanks to Squigly contribution as a promotion mascot but everyone was able to put in their hours and breakthrough, though on the Player's end he was less than thrilled having to clean up after everyone and making multiple runs to the bathroom to keep that dreadful place spike-and-span but at this point work was work for him and the faster he could do it done the better.
Heart-to-Heart

Noon was finally upon Canopy and the brutal rush finally eased up now that most of the younger customers were in school.

The Player was on break while Feng, Filia and Squigly were all free to go home since they were under 18 and didn't have to work the same hours as the Player, the only exception was Squigly, she was the senior of the group at 28 years of age after all, but her physical appearance was that of a teenager so she got privilege of leaving early. Regarding the Player it was never established how old he actually was but, for a rough estimate, he had to be around 18 years or so - older than Filia but younger than Parasoul.

The Player, Filia, Squigly and Feng were out in town enjoying their free time at a bakery, snacking on sweets after a busy day. The three girls stood outside waiting for the Player to join them.

Feng opened wide and bit down on a jelly filled doughnut. The powdery white sugar on the surface made a small mess around her mouth as she chewed. "Mmm! That's so good."

"Certainly is." Filia spoke between chews on a piece of hot cinnamon bun. "I'm glad we were able to finally check this place out, Squigly."

"I feel the same." She agreed. Following her friends lead Squigly broke a piece of her strawberry shortcake with a plastic knife and brought it up to her mouth only to realize she was unable to bypass the stitches after accidentally hitting them. Her eye peered over to Feng who observed curiously. "...Heh. Actually, I'm not all that hungry right now."

She was obviously lying as traces of disappointment could be seen on her face after she laid the fork and cake back inside its small triangular container to save it for later. Leviathan was going to have to consume the cake for her in order to receive the nourishment but what's better than getting to feel the cake melt away on your own tongue.

"Why not just take the costume off?" Feng suggested. "Aren't those stitches just for show?"

Squigly raised her sleeve up to her mouth to cover the stitches. "Oh, um-"

"Actually how are you able to do that thing where you speak without using your mouth?" Feng asked another question almost immediately after the first.

"That's-"

Feng took a closer step making Squigly back her head away from the sudden intrusion of her personal space. "And how do you make that echo after talking? Do you have some kind of voice box device?"

"I-I-I... Uh, Filia?"

Filia wasn't going to be of any help and she knew that the moment Squigly called her name out assistance - the only thing Filia could do was shrug her shoulders while holding a grin of uncertainty.

Luckily the Player was finally done inside the bakery and had his bag of treats. "Ok, I got everything."

Squigly seizes this moment as her get out of jail free card by wrapping one arm around the Player's
"...Sienna, what are you doing?" The Player had lowered his head to whisper down to her.

"She keeps asking questions about my 'costume'. I clearly don't have any answers for this!" She replied in similar tone though with a bit of panic.

The Player retracts his arm from Squigly's grip and stands upright. "Well I can't just leave. I'm only on break, I got about 25 minutes left before I head back in for work."

"Oh yeah. What time will you be home?" Squigly asked.

"Around 5, the usual."

"If you'd like, Filia and I can stick around and-"

"No. Just go home and wait till I get back."

He came off as rather stern instantly making Squigly see how serious he was, but this only made her feel unwanted. She slightly lowers her head and stands in silence.

It wasn't hard to see that she wasn't feeling good about it, making the Player sigh. "I won't be long."

"But-!" She looks up only to have the Player lay his hand down upon her head.

"Don't worry. I'll bring home food and we can all eat together. If you really want to help then just wait for me. You understand?"

She didn't but wasn't in the mood to protest with her current mindset regarding his feelings toward her. "Yeah. I guess." Squigly didn't even bother to make eye contact when answering.

He could tell she was just saying that but he didn't have time to sit here down for a talk. He gave Squigly a pat on the shoulder for assurance and turned to Filia. "I'll be back soon."

"I know. Just take it easy."

"I always do."

"Oh?" Filia challenged that statement with a doubting smile. The Player knew that look anywhere and playfully huffs at her gesture, he then held his fist up to her. "Just because your nickname is 'Player' doesn't mean you can just try and play me. You and I both know that's not true." She chuckled and had her fist meet with his.

"Maaaaaybe." He laughs a bit with her. "Well, anyway, I'm off to see a friend before heading back to work so look after each other on the way back." He then turns to Feng. "I'll catch you later, Feng."

"Right." She nods. "See you tomorrow." As the girls watch him depart Feng stretches her arms out and faces Filia and Squigly. "I should be heading off too. Work might be over but I still have to focus on my training back at the circus. Gotta stay in shape, right?"

Filia wasn't sure she was in the right position to answer that considering she was quite plump from all of Samson's eating on top of her own habits but she plays along anyway, "R-Right! Hehe... Once I get in I'm gonna work out and stuff. Nyhayaha! Ehehe... Eeeeh..." that dorky laugh wasn't going to fool anyone, just looking at her and anybody could tell she was saying that just to say it but the
Dagonian girl didn't mind as she just laughs with her.

"Work up a sweat for the both of us, Filia." Feng winks at her and gives a supporting thumbs up.

"Heh. I will. See you tomorrow, Feng."

The gang was now split down to Filia and Squigly. As Filia waves goodbye to their new friend Squigly remained unusually quiet.

"Guess we should start heading back." Filia said now looking to a meloncholly Squigly.

"Yeah." The disappointment in her tone was rather apparent causing Filia to worry a bit.

"Squigly, what's wrong?"

"Nothing."

Filia placed her hands on her hips and waited to see if Squigly would change her mind, Squigly reads Filia's body language and realizes her friend wasn't convinced but remains quiet in hopes of getting off the subject.

"Don't lie to me. Is it because of the Player? It's ok, you can talk to me. What's on your mind?"

"...I don't think he wants me around."

"Why would you think that?"

"Do you see how he acts around me? Between never wanting me outside and never wanting my help with anything it just begins to show. He doesn't have to say it himself because actions speak louder than words."

"He's like that with me too. I suppose he is a bit overprotective but he only wants the best for us. I admit there are times when I'm often...vexed by that kind of behavior because it feels as if he doesn't trust me enough to help. I don't say anything about it because I don't want him to worry, especially since he's already exhausted himself out, trying to balance work in order to keep a roof over our heads and figuring out this new power."

"...Sounds like pride." Samson spoke from underneath Filia's hat, just low enough for the two of them to hear. "He didn't get that way until that nonsense about being 'special' surfaced."

"You really think so, Samson?" Filia asked knowing that could very well be a possibility.

"I do but it's anyone's guess. Just let him do whatever he feels is right. Sooner or later he'll realize he's working himself to the ground, trying to do everything on his own."

Samson's hypothesis was able to shed new light for Squigly. The Player didn't seem like the type of guy who just wouldn't want her around, in fact his generosity of allowing her to live with Filia and himself proved that wasn't the case, it was rough with three because they were already tight on room with just the two of them, the name 'Poorman's Hotel' wasn't just for show.

Meanwhile the Player was making haste to reach his destination. He took many shortcuts throughout the restless districts of Downtown and came across familiar territory, the road he traversed lead to the ruins of the Grand Cathedral. He bypassed many restricted and construction signs however there was no construction being done, perhaps this was just an extra precaution to keep the public away and nothing more.
In the depths of the ruined Skullgirls hideout Marie was lying on an old wooden bed in the fetal position. As she laid with her eyes closed there was a disturbance in the area which alerted her. She rises in a mild panic and faces the entrance of her hidden chamber in a battle ready stance.

The door opens and the Player walks in only to see Marie assuming a defensive position. He quickly throws his hands into the air to show he meant no harm.

"Easy, it's just me." He spoke calmly.

Seeing that it was only him Marie settled down. "Oh. Sorry." She wasted no time with an apology and sat down on the bed.

"It's cool. It's not like you attacked me or anything so no harm done." He lowered his hands and held up the bag he had from the sweets shop. "I got you something."

Marie sees the bag with its cute mascot symbol on the front but it didn't seem to change her expressionless glare. "You're still bringing me food? I told you I don't need it."

The Player walks over to the bed and lays the bag on the mattress. "Yeah, yeah, Skullgirl immunity and all that. I get it."

"So why do you keep coming here with it?"

"Well, it's not about needing it or not... It's about feeling normal. I guess. You've spent most of your time angry and pursuing revenge I just thought it'd be nice if you could remember what it was like when you didn't have to worry about all that."

Marie wasn't sure how to respond so she instead just watches as he reached into the bag and fetched one of the many goods he had.

"Look, I got cookies!" He spoke in a cheerful tone but it would only make him feel a bit awkward since she didn't respond and kept a straight face. "You should try one."

"..." She looks over to the bag but remains quiet.

The Player bites into the cookie and shrugs his shoulders with a smile. "Or not. Perhaps I should go." He turns around and takes the first step toward the exit.

"...Wait."

"Hm?"

"...I'm sorry. I'm grateful for your kind gesture."

"Oh yeah?" He turns back to her with a look of intrigue.

"You don't have to--"

Before she could even finish her sentence the Player jumped onto her mattress taking her by surprise. "Way ahead of you." He rolls onto his backside to make his smiling face apparent, he was actually delighted to see that the bed was soft and quite comfortable, but Marie was nearly bounced off to the side because of him.

Once Marie was settled she disapprovingly shakes her head at his sporadic actions but hat was him and she couldn't even get mad.
A bit of time has passed and the two were sitting beside one another on the bed, their backs resting against the wall while the bag of treats was stationed between them, the Player was doing all the eating and Marie was still observing the first cookie she picked up.

"...Hm. What kind of cookie is this?" She asked.

The Player looks over to her and wipes the crumbs from his mouth using his forearm. "That's a-Uh..." Not having a clue himself he digs into the bag and took out a piece of paper that came with his purchase, it was a list of all the cookies "It's called a 'Bredele'. Oooh, fancy. It's a foreign cookie. Why not take a bite?"

She takes a second gander at the cookie and tucks her lips in. "Guess I can try it." She opens her mouth and takes a bite. "Oh!" She displays a jolt of surprise.

"Well?"

"It's good."

"Of course it's good. Here," he sat the bag in her lap "eat up. There's plenty."

Marie looks down to the bag and then back at the Player. "Have you ever realized you're too nice?"

"Too nice?"

"Yes. Like... Why are you doing this for me? I'm a Skullgirl. You're always taking time out of your day to see how I'm doing. If you're not here for that then you're bringing food and just sitting here. You even stopped your friend from taking my life when I was already on the verge of death, by allowing her to kill me you would've done the world a great favor for the next seven years. Aren't you afraid that your kindness will end up hurting you?"

"If I'm too nice it's because I got it from /you/." He continued to smile while explaining.

"I don't follow."

"Didn't I tell you? Ever since I got here you've done nothing but help me. You've helped me see the bigger picture of what's going on. It's because of you I'm friends with Filia and Sienna. It's because of you that I'm able to help them bring out that amazing power they have hidden deep within themselves and let's not forget that without you I wouldn't have been able to save Umbrella. Don't you realize how much that means to us?"

He then thought back to Marie's explanation on why she even decided to become the Skullgirl in the first place: "I accepted the Skull Heart in hopes of challenging a world run through with corruption." This revelation of selflessness on Marie's end truly put her situation in perspective for the Player.

He gently clenched his fist just thinking about how much she's had to suffer and shoulder emotionally, he was unable to bear the thought of leaving her to continue living such a hard life on her own and craved the need to help in any way possible.

"...You became the Skullgirl to try and change the world. You were willing to become what everyone feared and hated to make a difference as long as it meant taking a step in the right direction. You saved people with your power and helped open my eyes. In a way...I just want to live up to your example."

Marie once again found herself unable to find the words needed to respond as the moment they shared was able to remind her of the time shared with a friend she cherished before a tragic fate befell
them.

Before losing herself in the haven that was her memories Marie opens her mouth to speak but is interrupted by the feeling of the Player's hand grasping her own, she lowers her head and sees that this was exactly the case.

"...It's because of you that I'm like this and I owe that much to you. I know you're suffering, even if you don't show it emotionally or say anything about it. I just want you to know that you'll always be my friend and I want to help you in any way that I can. To save you from this cursed fate you have to shoulder."

It was naïve of him to think this way, no matter how much he hoped or wished for a different outcome the fate of the Skullgirl was going to be the same, one way or another, and Marie knew this better than anyone but something in her heart felt it would've been wrong to declare him as a fool for keeping a glimmer of hope since her choice in taking the Skull Heart was done in hopes of saving the world. She hadn't even realized how much alike they were.

Marie knew of the Player's plight and looked deep into his eyes to see the determination he carried and ultimately she couldn't help but admire this. She closes her eyes and leans over, resting her head on his shoulder much to the Player's surprise.

"You already have." She says gently with an honest smile she didn't even know she had.

The Player allows her to rest peacefully and doesn't say a word, instead choosing to let her enjoy this time of peace. He looks forward and lays his head back against the wall, soon closing his eyes to rest them for a bit.

'...Patricia.' A name Marie mentally mentions to herself in a saddened tone. The smile she once had didn't last very long.

There was never a time Marie was able to find it in herself to show any sign of genuine happiness. She didn't realize it this state of emotional misery was eating away at her as she was slowly becoming a shell of her former self.

She often wondered why she had to endure what she did at such a young age, before she became a Skullgirl, back when she would often pray without knowing who she was even praying to, but when she was desperate for answers she continuously turned to forces beyond her comprehension, forces that would eventually lead her to the Skull Heart.

The Skull Heart, the main cause of all the grief and horrors Canopy had to endure for so many years. Where did it come from and why does it exist to spread death? Why corrupt women and turn them into monsters? Many questions that remain truly ambiguous to this day.

For most people the origin of the artifact doesn't matter, what does matter is seeing the Skullgirl meet her end so they can live peaceful lives and see another day.

Within the Canopy Kingdom lies a group of talented individuals who dedicate their lives to fighting in order to keep the peace against the Skullgirls tyranny: the Anti-Skullgirl Labs. This organization is home to a wealth of agents who put their lives on the line to develop special tools or provide human enhancements to combat the almighty threat of the Skullgirl.

Lab 0: The secret lab. Research Skullgirl blood

Lab 1 and 2: Research labs which developed technology for the other labs
Lab 3: Super soldier development

Lab 4: Handheld weapon and vehicle development

Lab 5: Specialized weapons

Lab 6: Theonite research

Lab 7: Medical/Drug research

Lab 8: Synthetic parasites

Lab 8 was easily the most progressive of the Anti-Skullgirls Labs, specializing in the development of manmade parasites, however since they are not true natural parasites, most of them do not have any sentience. Recently Lab 8 has made a breakthrough...

A handful of fellow Lab 8 agents gather in a dimly lit room where a large collection of TV’s stacked together in front of a small couch, apparently running multiple classic silent cartoon’s at once. There were three agents, an elderly man and two younger recruits, one male, one female.

"Leduc, Hive..." The elder began to speak revealing the names of the younger agents. "Meet, Peacock, Lab 8's magnum opus!" The elder held out his arm as if presenting a new invention.

Leduc was a young man with blonde hair and Hive had a fashionably contrasting warm pink color going on. The two look down to the chair and the only thing they notice is a little girl in a top hat watching the cartoons.

"So this is Project: Peacock!" Leduc states while further examining the young girl from behind. "I've read your papers, but I'm embarrassed to say that I can barely follow them."

"I'll explain." The elder had no hesitation in jumping right into an explanation. "Project: Peacock is equipped with not one, but two synthetic parasites. Lab 0 created one other like her, but more...extreme methods were required to complete the synchronization."

Hive's mind was particularly drawn to the girl unique looking appendages which appears as two slender metallic 'arms' with metallic 'eyes' placed at intervals on each arm.

"Two synthetic parasites?" Hive questioned curiously at the news. "Regulating the soul contamination must be difficult."

The elder nods for confirmation. "Indeed, but with the proper Theonite balance, I think we could graft even more onto future subjects. The Argus system not only lets her see everything, but the eyes generate powerful Z-rays at the precise wavelength needed to disrupt a Skullgirl's presence."

He was referring the girl's mechanical like limbs, her 'arms' were the Argus Agony system. While the three were conversating the noise was, ironically, getting in the way of the girl's silent cartoon. She looks over her right shoulder, eyes heavily shadowed only to reveal a sharp toothy mouth housing a comically large cigar that you would only see in a cartoon.

"Hey, gramps... Shut it – I'm busy here."

The man sighs while Leduc and Hive look on rather surprised at her response to their conversation. "The Avery Unit is... admittedly a bit less well-understood." He continued to explain while scratching the back of his grey hair. "We designed it to be a spatial link between her body and Lab 8's vast underground arsenal, but... she's doing things with it I never imagined possible."
Even after letting them know she was trying to enjoy her cartoons the older participants continued to talk over her show. She lowers her head in slight annoyance.

"Seriously, Doc – shut it! It's getting to the good part!"

They all look down to the girl once more after seeing that she really wanted her peace. She was accompanied by a small bird, who was interestingly dressed just like her, the bird was named Avery and was the Avery Unit the elder spoke of just moments prior. The two were joined by a small bomb with arms and legs. The trio looked like they were ripped right out of a classic American 1930's cartoon who were also watching cartoons that appeared similar to them. It's a mind freak but was somehow normal.

Giving them the quiet she requested the three older agents move away to let her enjoy her many shows.

"To think... that poor, mutilated orphan I found may be the one to defeat the Skullgirl once and for all." The elder spoke with a shake of the head just thinking of the horrors that transpired in the past.

The Past...

Multiple black and white flashes of two young girls go by as if looking back on the past. The two were always seen together, playing, smiling, laughing, eating and enjoying fun times in their pajama's when it came time for bed which hinted at a deep friendship. Their laughter is cut to black.

"You have to have a little faith." The voice of the Player is heard.

A clear view of the Player is seen talking while in the perspective of Marie. Squigly could be seen standing behind him and Filia watched on the side, showing that what was happening was a peak of the past, just a few weeks ago after the battle with Double.

An emotionally unfazed Marie looks on at him, maintaining the same voided glare. The glare shifts everything back to black.

"You want faith? 'Faith' and 'hope' is a lie. You're far too naive." Marie's voice responds in the dark.

Multiple flashes of the kids once again goes by, one of the girls was becoming increasingly familiar in appearance.

"Patricia, look! Doesn't this look good on me?" The girl dressed in the maid outfit twirled around happily to show off her dress. The name 'Patricia', just like the one Marie mentioned earlier.

The figure of the other girl, who was shrouded in light, pulls on the familiar girls arm. "No fair! I want one too!"

There were a few flashes that skip ahead to both girls donning maid outfits. The visions become clear and the girl who mentioned the name Patricia appeared very similar to Marie in appearance, the only difference being a bright and happy smile.

A few skips later and the flashes take a very dark turn as the nations are seen in the middle of war which was stopped as the rise of Nancy as the Skullgirl rose. With the three kingdoms sharing a common enemy they team up and fight the Skullgirl together but it came at the price of crime skyrocketing.

Bandits flooded the land and human trafficking became a normality. The two girls are seen hiding away under a bed as gunfire pierces their bedroom walls during a violent raid. Skip ahead and the
Medici's are seen having a hand in the chaos. The girls are found and are dragged away like dogs on leashes.

"These two will do nicely." One of the Medici muscle says while throwing the two girls in the back of a truck along with a handful of other scared children.

As the truck is being driven away the girl who's figure is covered in light is seen comforting the crying doppelganger of Marie. "Don't be scared. We'll be alright."

The two are seen working under harsh conditions in ragged clothing, hard labor while also getting struck by whips whenever they became physically exhausted, showing the cruel nature that was slavery.

"I'll get us both out of here and we'll be free of all this. We can go home and go back to how we were!" The shining girl declared as her friend and neighboring child slaves look up to her determined face. There was something about her that encouraged strength.

That look of determination turns to horror as an uncertain amount of time later she is seen being dragged off, bound in rope as her friends are forced to watch her behind bars.

"You disrespectful little brat!" One of the slave owners shouts while pulling her along the dirt. "It's time you learned your place!"

Agonizing screams are heard as Marie's lookalike cries out in despair with shrunken eyes. Blood is seen splattering everywhere and the slave owners watch with cruel smiles as a gruesome public torture of the brave girl is displayed to the child slaves who were forced to watch.

Her limbs were cut off and her eyes were gouged out by a hulking male using nothing but his thumbs to get it done.

"And let that be a lesson to the rest of you! Know your place!" The head slave owner yelled out as the mutilated girl was put on display for all to see.

"PATRICIA!"

"Thank you... For your undying love and care for me." The girl, possibly this 'Patricia', speaks in her weak dying breath to her friend whom wept uncontrollably by her side now that she was free to see her during the night. "My time with you was pure light in the dark. From the bottom of my heart I'm glad I was able to make friends with you... Mar-"

The vision is cut short to show the girl being branded in the back. The sizzling sound of the hot metal being pressed against her skin plagues the scene and though her screams of agony are inaudible the taunting laughter of the slave master is heard.

"Never forget your place, brat." The slave owner states while grinding his boot into her head while she laid lifelessly on the ground with her brand plastered on her back.

A quick transition shows the girl on her knees by a windowsill praying desperately under the moonlit beaming through the window as heavy tears flow freely down her bruised face.

Multiple cuts to more recent events flash: A silhouette of Marie being presented the Skull Heart by Double, the Player meeting Marie for the first time, Umbrella making her way to the cathedral, the Medici tower, a look of a girl who looks dangerously close to Filia albeit a lot thinner and the lack of Samson but this is quickly changed to Filia. Other little pieces of memory fly by but are too fast to identify.
What's left of all the horrors adds up to a red skull which is revealed to have originated from the eye of Marie shedding a single tear while lying awake against the shoulder of the now sleeping Player thus revealing the present. It was as if everything that transpired was memories belonging to Marie.
It was the start of a dark and moonless night in the Canopy Kingdom. The wind was howling eerily as the brown leaves of autumn covered the streets of New Meridian.

Many buildings and shops were decorated in spooky themed decor, such as displaying jack-o-lantern's in display shops, having skeleton and bat decals placed on windows but most notably were all the kids dressed in costumes which varied from cute and cuddly to terrifying and monstrous. These signs were an obvious giveaway that tonight was the night of Halloween and all were getting into the spirit of celebrating ghost and goblins but more importantly the candy quest that was trick-or-treating.

At the Poorman's Hotel Squigly was in front of the downstairs mirror trying out her costume with Leviathan - she was dressed in a tattered wedding gown, which covered her skeletal arm and hole in her back, complete with a bouquet of black roses. Leviathan wore only a top hat that was small enough to fit his head.

"Leviathan, what do you think? Can this pass as a suitable costume?"

"Of course. You've spent the last few weeks crafting it to perfection. It suites you very well, milady. Though I fear I've come up short - I only have this to wear." He brings the tip of his tail up to adjust his top hat.

Squigly wraps her hand around Leviathan and brings him down so that she could spoil him with cuddles. "Don't apologize. Your hat is so cute, Leviathan! You're so handsome with it on!"

A pleased Leviathan melts away into his hosts affection and nuzzles his cheek into her as if he was a pet returning the love to his owner. The pair was so wrapped up in each other they didn't notice the Player sneaking up behind them while concealing most of his appearance with a cape, Dracula style.

Once he got close enough he jumps at them. "GIVE ME YOUR BLOOD!" He swings the cape from around his body to fully reveal himself.

"Wow, I actually scared you? Ha!"

"Of course you scared me! You came out of nowhere!" Squigly gently shoves him with her good arm.

"Aren't you supposed to be the one who can sense people and stuff? I thought you were going to detect me."

"Hmm. Perhaps I've been getting too caught up in my own costume." She shyly scratches her cheek with her skeletal index finger.

Leviathan smiles at their exchange but then focuses on the Player. "What are you going as?"

"Can't you tell? I'm a vampire." The fake fangs were the only thing relating to the vampire look. He lacked the classic goth aesthetic for a more unique take on the old vampire tradition.

The Player was dressed in all black to really get in the spirit of Halloween. His outfit consisted of a
black jacket that he kept unzipped thus revealing his grey shirt underneath that was also tucked into his baggy black shorts which he wore over a pair of slim-fit pants wrapped in red bandages. His shoes had a single white strap and silver buckle on the outer sides across the midsection.

Unlike Squigly and Leviathan the Player was flashy in appearance, he even had little devil wings on the back of his jacket and white gloves that made it appear as if he had clawed fingers. It appeared that he used some form of black makeup to ashen and shadow the area around his eyes to really give off a dark and mysterious appearance.

Squigly and Leviathan checked him out from head to toe but didn’t see the resemblance. "Nope. I honestly can't tell." They answered in sync only to laugh once they realized they spoke in harmony.

"You two must be blind. This is clearly a vampire costume. Come to think of it... What are you supposed to be?"

"I'm a bride!" Squigly's tone was rather upbeat and cheery on answering as she took great pride in her creation.

"A bride? But that's not scary. It's Halloween, not your wedding. What was wrong with your look before? You had that zombie appeal going for ya."

"You don't have to look scary to dress up for Halloween." She answered rebelliously but based on how the Player replied she just pouts and gently spans her thighs with her fists in a cute fit. "You don't think it looks nice?"

"I didn't mean it like that, I just wasn't expecting it as all. You look beautiful in it."

And that turned her around instantly. Her cheeks darkened in color and she sways adorably from the compliment. "Aaaaw! Thank you so much! I worked really hard on it."

"Still, you would've been cooler in a more zombified outfit." He teases her with a smile.

She instantly went back to pouty. "I'm a 28 year old woman who spent most of my life asleep and single. If I want to pretend I'm a bride then I'm going to pretend I'm a bride."

"...Hm." Was all the Player could muster from that. Squigly's tone became a lot more serious when explaining so the Player figure it was best not to touch upon the subject again. "Um, what about you, Leviathan?"

"I'm her best man."

"Don't bride's usually have a bridesmaid?"

"HE'S ALL I GOT!" Squigly lashes out at the Player in a humorous fit.

The Player was instantly intimidated and held up his hands up defensively while trying his best to impersonate a smile. "R-Ri-Right... Of course. How could I be so stupid?"

Just then Squigly smiles back at him, feeling that they were both on the same page. Even Leviathan was a bit shocked to see Squigly react the way she did with his wide and blank circular anime-ish eyes.

"We all make mistakes." She happily pats the Player's head before returning to humming whimsically in the mirror, marveling at her wedding gown.
The Player takes a step back and adjusts his collar. 'Jeez... I don't think I'll ever see anything more scary than wedding-clad Squigly.' He thought to himself only to face the other direction and see a feminine figure standing at the other side of the room in nothing but a long white t-shirt and silky black hair draping over her face. "AAAAHHH!"

Squigly jumps at the Player's outburst and turns only to have the Player run behind her for protection. "What is it now?" She asks while looking back to him from her shoulder.

"It's that girl from that Ring movie!" He points forward in a fright.

"It's just me." The girl pulled her hair from her face as if they were curtains thus revealing Filia's smiling face.

The Player wasn't used to seeing Samson so sleek and straight so her appearance caught him completely off guard. He scared Squigly and Filia scared him, Karama didn't waste any time getting him back.

"Ha! I always get a kick scaring the crap out of you." Samson remarks.

"I wasn't scared." The Player claims.

"Then why are you still hiding?" Samson asked.

He looks up and sees Squigly and Leviathan looking down to him and then back to Filia and Samson who were smiling. He plays it off to make it seem like he was checking the fabric of Squigly's gown as he pinched a lower piece of the material and caressed it using his index, middle finger and thumb.

"I was just checking out the marvelous detail of Squigly's wedding dress. Just take a look at this, she used Venice embroidered lace fabric."

"No I didn't." Squigly replied with blunt honesty.

The Player drops his head and sighs before standing back up. "Can we just focus on our night out together? I haven't gone out trick-or-treating since I was a kid. It feels nice getting back into the swing of things and just look at our costumes, we'll make a bucket load of candy."

"I thought we were only going out to let Umbrella do the trick-or-treating." Said Filia.

"That's what you said." Squigly added. "We're dressing up for the Halloween party we were invited to."

The Player, bemused, reaches for his mask and a plastic bag to carry his candy. "Right. Right. Of course."

On the subject of his mask it was the final piece to complete his costume. It was circular in shape and had small horns on the top with a jagged, jack-o'-lantern-esque mouth curled into a twisted smile, and triangular eyes. The mask's right eye is green and the left one appears to be closed as if giving a wink. The Player wore his mask off to the side to conceal his right eye.

Filia giggled at his response and adjusted her hair so that only her left eye was visible. "I'm really excited for tonight! It's going to my first Halloween! Or at least the first Halloween that I'm aware of."

"Mine too." Squigly approaches Filia with a similar expression. "I've never been to a Halloween
party before but it'll be my first event out and having you all there only makes it better."

The Player was making minor adjustments to his mask while looking in the mirror. "Now all we do is wait for". A knock at the door cut the Player short, "-nobody, because they're right on cue. You guys ready?"

"Of course." Filia answers. "Samson, get ready."

"This is gonna suck. That party better have all the alcohol I can drink." The plan was for staying out of sight so Samson closed his eyes and mouth, making it appear as if Filia had a normal head. His mouth was shut in a way so that his large teeth were hidden as well.

"Leviathan, you're-"

"Part of the costume. Already ahead of you, madam."

His friends were looking more than perfect for tonight. He took one last glance at them with a nod of approval. "Looking good, ladies. Now let's get to it."

The trio head for the door to meet with whoever was knocking. The Player opens the door and finds the Renoir sisters standing before him and dressed in costume.

Parasoul was dressed in a sleeveless black bustier-like top adorned with white feathers and a small cross cut out of the midriff; purple nylons emblazoned with bat patterns; black boots; and conspicuous batlike wings protruding from her back and the sides of her head, the wings were synthetic decoration to make it appear organic. Umbrella was wearing the same outfit but in a crimson color scheme.

"Lord, have mercy..." The Player nearly fainted at the sight of Parasoul and collapsed back.

"Oh jeez...!" Filia grunts after catching him.

"What's wrong with him?" Umbrella asked.

Filia tried her best to get him back on his feet but the Player remained limp. "He's fine. C'mon, stand up."

The words being mumbled out the Player's mouth was gibberish. Squigly covered her mouth with her sleeve to hide the fact that she was laughing, a tear formed in Leviathan's eye as he tried his best not to laugh or blink.

"Perhaps he's not feeling well?" Parasoul questioned in concern. She crouched down to him and placed her hand on his forehead to see if he had a fever.

The moment her hand touched his head the Player came around. Shaking his head as if snapping out of a trance.

"You ok?" Filia asked.

"Yeah... I'm fine. I just..." He awakens to Parasoul's face and could feel himself growing weak again but he composed himself. "I'm fine but hot damn. Parasoul, that costume." He gets himself up using his own strength.

Parasoul got herself up along with the Player. "You like it? I wasn't sure about it at first but Umbrella convinced me to use this."
The Player looks down to Umbrella and then back to Parasoul. "Nagging?" He asked casually.

"Nagging." Parasoul answered with a nod.

"It was between this or that stupid Annie costume!" Umbrella argued.

Parasoul faced Umbrella with an immediate answer. "It wasn't stupid."

"Yes it was! You were dressed as that kid from that dumb show!"

"Annie and Sagan's adventure is not dumb! It's a great show with good characters and an interesting story!"

Umbrella crossed her arms and turned her back on her sister. "It's sad to see a 25 year old woman reduced to a fangirl of a kid's show."

Parasoul's eye twitched and she snarls lightly but calms herself. "I don't have to justify myself to you."

Much to the Player's surprise Parasoul was showing a side of herself that he didn't even know existed. Filia and Squigly actually admired their sibling quarrel and thought they were funny, the two snickering to one another in the midst of their bickering.

"Nothing quite like siblings, huh?" The Player shared a single laugh as he whispered over to the girls. "So! Parasoul, what brings you here? Were you just dropping Umbrella off?"

"Originally I was but after I got into costume I figure why not join you. Umbrella can be quite a handful and I wouldn't want to just dump her on you."

"Hm. You're right about th-"

Filia busts into the conversation by brushing against the Player's shoulder and making him move to the side. "She's no bother. We really like having her around." She wasn't doing it to be rude but she felt that she had to clarify her feelings toward the young Renoir.

Upon getting a closer look Umbrella was finally able to realize it was actually Filia standing before her. "Oh! Filia, it's you! Wow I didn't recognize you with that costume. It's really cool!"

"Thank you, Umbrella, your costume is great too. Did you buy it?"

"Nope. These were custom made for us back home."

"Really? That's awesome"

"You know this girl, Umbrella?" Parasoul asked.

"Of course. She was the one who was helping me look for mom. Remember I told you?"

Bringing up that subject reminded Parasoul of the deep anxiety she felt when Umbrella went looking for 'their mother'. She replied with a soft "Oh," before standing in silence, but only for a moment. "I see."

Filia stood and bows respectfully to Parasoul. "I'm sorry! I forgot to introduce myself. Sorry about that, I can be a bit of an airhead sometimes. My name is Filia."

Parasoul extends her hand with a smile. "It's nice to meet you. My name is Parasoul."
The name 'Parasoul' struck Squigly and Leviathan with a heavy sense of familiarity. Perplexed, the two look on as she shook hands with Filia. The voices of her friends seemed to have zoned out, transitioning into mere muffling.

"...Parasoul." Leviathan speaks via telepathy to his host. "That name... It belongs to the daughter of the late Nancy."

"The one who became the Skullgirl." Squigly replied in an even softer tone. "She's also the one the Player mentioned. When we saved the girl."

"Then that would mean Nancy had another daughter." Leviathan added, noticeably losing that convincing Halloween prop look he had.

Suddenly the Player snaps his fingers in front of Squigly. After the fourth snap she blinks sporadically and faces him. "H-Huh?"

"You feeling ok? You were spacing out for a moment." The Player explained now that he had her attention.

"Oh... Sorry, I just- uh, guess I had a lot of nothing on my mind. Heh."

It wasn't like Squigly to just zone out with such a concentrated face, he knew she was making a coverup but decided to leave it alone in case it was a personal matter. He placed his arm on her shoulder and held up the opposite hand to introduce her.

"You've never met my other friend, this is Sienna."

Regardless of her last revelation it was still a high honor to have the two princesses in her presence. She gets onto one knee and bows. "Forgive my uncouth manners earlier, your highness. It is an honor to be in your grace." It was burning Leviathan up that he couldn't properly show his respects to Canopy's leader but his host's safety was of top priority and ignored his chivalrous code.

In the middle of her bowing Umbrella grabs onto Squigly's face with gently pinches and pulled on her cheeks much to Leviathan's humorous frozen chagrin and Squigly's comically fitting squash and stretched face.

"You went all out for your costume." Umbrella states while pulling on her to see if her face was a mask. "So this isn't a mask?"

"Vo, Vit Visn't..." Was Squigly's variant of 'No, it isn't...' since her mouth was being forced open.

Umbrella's eyes narrowed and her mouth shaped into the appearance of the number 3. "Well how do you keep the blue face paint on?"

"Umbrella!" Parasoul had to pull her sister away to get her to stop. "Have you no manners!!"

"What?" The delivery in her question was far too innocent for her own good.

Squigly stands and rubs her cheeks with her iconic long sleeves. "Mmmm..." She groans.

"Sienna, I am so sorry. Umbrella is usually never this grabby."

"I'm not?" / "She's not?" Both Umbrella and the Player ask simultaneously.

Parasoul sighs and looks down to her sister in concern. "I would hope not. You're a princess, act like one."
"It's fine." Squigly replied with a forced laugh. "She's just a child so no harm done."

"No, no. I won't stand for it. Umbrella, apologize."

A pouty Umbrella kicks at the floor rebelliously but complies. "Sorry."

While Filia and Squigly share a laugh the Player remained apathetic, showing his impatience by frequently looking at the clock in the nearby kitchen.

"Not to rush introductions guys but we're running a Halloween chapter and we've got to get this show on the road."

The girls all look at him with puzzled glares. "What?" They all ask the same question.

The Player, with his plastic bag in hand, marches forward. "Trick-or-Treating time! Filia, lock the door."

Now he was speaking Umbrella's language. The young princess reached for hammerspace and pulled out a cartoonishly oversized bag and runs ahead to catch up with the Player. "Wait up!"

Parasoul, Filia and Squigly watch them off and Parasoul sighs like an exhausted mother figure and walks ahead. "I often worry about those two."

Filia locks the front door behind everyone and safely tucks the key away into her bra seeing as how she lacked pockets underneath her costume. The two parasitic hosts were the last few to run ahead. Halloween was officially a go for the group of friends.

The Player and Umbrella's excitement knew no bounds throughout the night, the duo went to every house they saw for a chance to claim their sweet treats. The most popular area they visited was Maplecrest and the neighborhood offered an abundance of healthy competition for candy goers, kids were racing from house to house in search of more but as the night went on houses were running short on supplies and the few that still had some available meant lines, long lines extending from the house walkway down to the sidewalk.

Parasoul didn't want Umbrella bent up on a sugar rush for the next few months but her sister reluctance to stop kept her going. At least she wouldn't have to go out to the store and buy her some for a while, she'll just have to hide the candy away once they returned home. Maplecrest was treated dry but there were more neighborhoods to see and considering how much sugary fuel the kids had the night was just getting started. The princess, Filia and Squigly waited patiently by a fenced off area while watching Umbrella and the Player waiting at another house.

"Goodness... How much candy can a human eat?" Parasoul questioned.

"I give them points for resilience." Filia comments.

"I just hope they don't eat themselves into a sugar coma." Squigly playfully remarks.

Filia crossed her arms at the thought of the Player being greedy with his sweets. "If he doesn't share with us once we get home I say we jump him."

"You read my mind." Squigly agrees delightfully.

The two girls have a playful laugh and Parasoul watches them with an amused smile, she looks back across the street to see Umbrella shine with laughter alongside the Player. The groups camaraderie
gave her a sense of warmth though she kept these feelings to herself.

Ever since Umbrella's retrieval she was strictly keeping Umbrella to her training and yet seeing how much fun she was having with everyone made her wonder if being so adamant was the way to raise her sibling. In fact it was only beginning to remind Parasoul of her own childhood, being forced to become a trained warrior worthy of her father's legacy. Parasoul herself was still young so she didn't really know what was best but, for her, all that mattered was seeing Umbrella happy.

A few minutes pass and the Player regroups with the girls with Umbrella following behind him with her large bag.

"Woo!" He exhales with a look of satisfaction from his bag of treats. "What a night! I got like 20 Kit Kats! Or whatever this world's equivalent to that is." He opens the bag and digs around for the candy. "...Oh right, the Tik Tak. How clever. So what's the equivalent to Tic Tacs?"

"What's a Tic Tac?" Filia asked with a slight tilt of her head.

"They're these tiny hard mints you eat to keep your breath fresh. For me, personally, they don't work as well as minty gum."

"Tiny hard mints? You mean Cit Cat mints?" Filia asked.

The Player paused briefly but ends up shrugging his shoulders. "Sure. Why not." There was no point in trying to question it at this point.

"Alright, it's getting late." Parasoul directs her words to Umbrella. "We should start heading back."

Naturally Umbrella wasn't happy to hear this and faces her sister with disinterest. "What? No! I can still fit more candy in my bag!"

"Umbrella, you're going to get a cavity eating all that junk."

"I want to be the kid who goes down in history for collecting the most candy in one night!"

Just looking at her bag and one could just tell she already achieved that. The Player, Filia and Squigly look to one another and exchange stares, all three having the same thought in mind.

Parasoul rolled her eyes, not willing to debate. "Umbrella, no. It's past your curfew."

The young princess knew not to challenge Parasoul when she was making that authoritative face so rather than continuing to argue she crosses her arms.

"I guess we ought to head back too." The Player says to Filia and Squigly. "By the time we get back and drop off the goods the party will most likely be popping off."

"I guess you're right." Filia replied.

While the gang was discussing their next move Umbrella was still sulking, but as she realized her chaperones were occupied with their discussion she turns her attention back to her candy collecting business. What could one more house hurt?

Her eyes fall upon the house they were standing before and it was quite large, almost resembling that of a manor, surely the residence was loaded with candy. Umbrella grins devilishly and sneaks off once she checked to make sure nobody was paying her any mind.

After discussing the plan with his roommates the Player turns to the princess. "So, what's up,
Parasoul? You wanna come with us?"

"Me?" She asked in a surprised tone.

"Yeah. You're more than welcome to come with us. And I bet you'll get a killer crowd with that outfit you got on. It'd be real nice if you could accompany us." His eyes were lustfully eying her from head to toe.

Filia pops the side of his head once she realized what he was doing. "What he meant to say was that there's a costume contest being held there and your outfit is so becoming that you should enter for a chance to win the prize."

"What was that for?" The Player asked while rubbing the back of his head.

Filia paid him no mind and Parasoul took a moment to think.

"Don't ignore me when I'm speaking to- Ow!" He could be heard complaining only to earn another pop.

"...I guess I could." Parasoul answered.

"Sweet." The Player cradles his fist within an open palm. "With you on our team there's no way we're going to lose."

Squigly steps forward. "Your highness, we know you're really busy. If your schedule doesn't allow for it then we completely understand."

"It's fine." Parasoul assures the group. "Actually, I'm looking forward to it, I don't often get a chance to attend parties like these so I'd like to experience it. At least this once."

"See? It all works out." The source of the Player's enthusiasm was quite clear but it also made him happy to see that she was willing to help them win the contest.

"Once I drop off Umbrella we can drive there. I'll pick you all up at the hotel."

"Sounds good, chief."

Parasoul closed her eye and smiles warmly with a soft giggle. It was really cute, nearly made the Player faint again. "Umbrella, we're about ready to g- Huh?"

Parasoul and the group look to where they last saw her but no sight of the young princess. They look around the general area but the streets were empty now that all the houses weren't giving out no more candy.

"Umbrella?" Filia called out. "Wasn't she just here?"

The Player nods. "Yeah. She was right here beside us."

"Where could she have gotten off to?" Parasoul asked.

Squigly looks beyond the large metal gate leading to the manor and sees the bag of candy Umbrella was carrying on the porch.

"Look." She initially points with her skeletal hand but after realizing what hand she was using she quickly throws it down and uses the other one. "Isn't that her bag?"
Parasoul squints her eyes and walks over to the gate. "It is but where's Umbrella?"

"Aaaw! Not this again..." The Player was already beginning to dread having to endure another search and rescue.

"I'm sure it's nothing." Said Filia in hopes of keeping everyone, especially Parasoul, calm. "Let's just go up there and see if the owners invited her in."

Parasoul nods. "Right." She opens the gate and walks toward the porch.

Squigly follows after her while Filia and the Player were the last to join them. As they approached the house it was clear to see that it was a derelict, but perhaps it was all for the Halloween spirit. The dead trees surrounding the house didn't make any better as it was beginning to make Filia worry with the creepy atmosphere.

On the second floor a shadowy figure watches the group approach the house through one of the boarded windows. The four friends arrive at the front door and Parasoul inspects the windows only to see that they were blocked by wooden planks nailed to the walls on the other side.

The Player tries to ring the bell but it didn't appear to work as there was no sound. Instead he grabs onto the platinum door knocker and knocks multiple times before waiting to get a response.

"Hm. There's something...off about this house." Squigly comments.

The Player looks over to her. "What do you mean?"

"You ever just get that feeling when you know something isn't right?"

"Ah. Yeah, I hear you. I'm trying to figure out why Umbrella would even come here."

Parasoul looks down to her bag of candy and shakes her head. "Getting more candy. I really need to ground her."

"That sounds good." The Player responds delightfully. He then looks back to the front door after letting enough time pass to warrant another try. He raised his hand to knock once more but the moment his hand drew near the front door slowly opens with a loud creak that echoed through the building.

From the entrance the group had a clear view of the foyer which had a fire going at the fireplace as well as lit candles.

"Huh. Well that's new." Said the Player.

Parasoul checks to see if there was anybody there to greet them but it became obvious this wasn't the case and she proceeds, leaving the Player and the girls following after her. Once they were inside the door closed behind them, which caught them all by surprise.

The group hesitantly pay it no mind and walk on until they got to the foyer. Parasoul investigates while the others take a minor gander at their surroundings.

"Do you think it's ok to just barge in?" Filia asked.


"Somebody has to be home." Parasoul comments with her focus being on the candles that were showing signs of being lit recently. To further back up her statement the house replies with the sound
of old wood being influenced upstairs.

"Yeah and if that's not enough we got a creepy house that answers us before the owner does." The Player says after tucking his hands away into his jacket pockets.

"Hello! Is anybody here?" Squigly calls out and waits for a response but nothing.

"Umbrella! If you're in here give us a shout!" Filia then makes an attempt.

Nothing. Not even the sound of the wood that once hinted at human presence.

The Player looks over to Parasoul. "Parasoul, is there any way for you to call her? Like on a phone or something?"

"I don't have any of my gear," she claims.

The Player sighs and looks in the other direction. "Of course not."

Just then thunder crashes and everyone jumps at the sudden noise. Filia hides behind Squigly for protection as the sound of heavy rain could be heard around them.

"A storm?" Squigly questions while holding a timid Filia.

Parasoul's eye narrows as she looks up to the structural glass ceiling which revealed that a storm was indeed going on.

The Player looks about and notices there were multiple doors and stairs leading to different sections of the house. Based on this setup it would've been easy to get lost, especially since they weren't familiar with the layout.

"We've got a little girl gone missing, a young group of strangers with no weapons in an old house, a thunderstorm that came out of nowhere and not a peep from the person who is potentially living in the house." He takes a moment to let it all sink in. "This is quickly turning into every horror movie I've seen. I think it's at this point that we never, and I mean NEVER, say-"

"We should split up." Parasoul suggests.

The Player throws his head back in angst. "UUUUUUUGGGGHHHHH-

To Be Continued...

A/N: Y'know, I was originally going to make this chapter non-canon because I only wanted it to be a fun special for Halloween but as I was writing I realized I had already introduced Squigly and Filia to Parasoul and them meeting in the future chapters wouldn't make sense because they wouldn't have known each other so I'm trying to decide whether or not it should be a core event or not, I'll keep you all updated on what I decide.

Another reason I wanted to have the Halloween story be its own thing is because the transition from the last chapter feels a bit off. I wanted to make a few more chapters that bridged off of that but as October went by I realized Halloween was coming up and I wanted to have the chapters out before November and since we're down to the last two days I had to make haste.

I guess that's about all I wanted to say. Filia, Squigly, Parasoul and Umbrella's costumes are
based on the designs Alex Ahad drew them in a while ago to celebrate Halloween, for those of you who don't know the Renoir sisters are dressed as Morigan Aensland and Lilith from Darkstalkers, Filia is the creepy little girl from the ring (no idea who she is because I never saw the movie) and I think Squigly is just a bride, if it's a reference to anything I'm not sure what it could be but she's still cute regardless. The Player is dressed as Sora during his visit to Halloween Town in Kingdom Hearts and Kingdom Hearts II.

If you want to see the picture of the girls from the man himself just google Skullgirls Halloween Alex Ahad, he named it "Happy Skullgirls Halloween"
Despite protests and pleas from the Player the group splits up to search the house for Umbrella. Parasoul leaves to check the west wing of the manor and Squigly takes the east leaving the Player, along with Filia, to check upstairs. The storm grew worse as the night went on.

The Player walks down one of the long hallways while Filia clings to his arm timidly.

"I-I can't believe they wanted us to split up."

The Player, who wasn't even in the mood to care anymore, carried a candlestick to guide their way. "Look on the bright side, we're the only ones who actually have common sense and are sticking together. Then again, you refused to go off on your own and tagged along."

"I'm not scared!"

"I never said you were." He laughs at her outburst.

Filia just gave herself away and blushes at her own mistake. "Hush..." She turns the other way, looking out to the window, to hide her rosy cheeks. "I'm just here to be your bodyguard so YOU wouldn't be scared."

Thunder crashed, detonating loudly with a menacing boom. Filia's eyes widen and she shrieks, wrapping both arms around the Player's arm and hiding her face in his shoulder.

"AH! Make it stop!"

"Nngh! C'mon, Filia. You're usually never scared of anything."

"We've never been in a situation like this... This house gives me the creeps. Aren't you scared?"

"Scared? Why would I be scared? I have you and you've got Samson."

Filia blinked twice while looking up to him. "Oh yeah! Samson!" Remembering this crucial fact influenced her to continuously pat her head. "Samson. Samson!"

Samson groaned with each tap and swats Filia's hand away. "Nnnnghhhh..."

"Samson? C'mon... Wake up."

"NNNNNGGH!" The parasite was still swatting away at her hand. He clearly wasn't ready to be woken up.

The Player sighs and bonks Samson on the head. "Hellooooooooooo-"

Rather than swatting at the Player Samson balls up a fist and swings it clean across the Player's face, making him tumble back into a wall.

"Are you ok?!!" Filia asks.

The Player rotates his jaw and looks at Filia. "You son of a bitch!" He lashes out and grabs onto Samson, pulling away at him.

The assault was meant for the parasite but Filia was getting all the punishment by having her head
pulled. Despite the Player's attempts Samson wasn't reacting outside of that one punch he delivered.

"Play-er! St-op!"

"No way, Filia, that hurt. This little bastard is gonna pay!"

"Samson's a-" Her head jerks back and her eyes widen, "really heavy sleeper! Once he's out he's out for the night!"

"You serious? Fine. Remind me to kick him in the ass later. Wait... Would his ass be yours?"

"No! And let go of my hair!"

The Player realized he was still holding Samson and releases him, thereby releasing Filia. "Oops. Sorry."

"You two are a handful..." She says while adjusting her locks.

The Player smirks bashfully and tries to distract Filia by turning his attention to one of the nearby doors in the hallway.

"Hey, Filia. Let's check this room out. Umbrella might be in here." He opens the door and, to neither of their surprise, finds that it was pitch black. The Player, who still had the candle, enters to brighten the room a bit.

Filia didn't want to go on but she had to stick close to avoid being on her lonesome. "Don't leave me behind."

"I'm not." The Player said as he held the candle up to the wall, inspecting the numerous portraits.

Filia wraps her arms around herself for comfort and slowly traverses the rickety wooden floor. She walks by a closet and glances through the doorframe. "...AH!" She cries out to the horror of what appeared to be a human figure clad in a hoodie assuming a crouching ninja stance.

The Player hears Filia and rushes to her side. "Filia, what's wrong?"

She points ahead, teeth chattering in fear. "S-S-S-Someone's there!"

The Player looks through the doorframe and sees the same silhouette in the dark. He holds the candle out to the shadows and once illuminated the figure they swore they saw was actually just a collection of old clothes piled on top of each other. Funnily enough they weren't even stacked to give the shape of an actual person.

"Oh. It's just clothes." The Player shook his head at the thought of it being a person. "I hate when my eyes play tricks on me in the dark."

Filia walks over to the clothes, kicks them over and quickly runs back to the Player to see if anything would happen. Nothing happened. "...Weird." She mumbles.

"Tell me about it." With that odd distraction out of the way the two turn their attention elsewhere. "Welp, there's nothing left in this room. So let's-" The Player's eye fell upon the old TV, which was on and displaying static. "Filia, why did you turn on the TV?"

"What? I didn't. I thought you turned it on. I was over here by the closet."

"I didn't turn it on. If the TV is on that must mean the power is working so let's get these lights on."
He goes over by the room door and flips the switch but nothing. He flips the switch back down and still nothing. The Player flips the switch frantically but the result was still the same.

Filia walks over to see what was going on. "It's not working?"

"No. The power is still out."

"Out? But how is the TV on?"

Suddenly a very faint voice could be heard gently echoing throughout the halls. The Player and Filia look to one another and instantly fell silent to make sure they were hearing correctly.

It was the voice of a little girl, based on her tone she was singing. The voice was whimsically repeating "I'm gonna get you..." With an occasional laugh between statements.

"...Is that Umbrella?" Filia asked.

The Player shook his head. "Horror trope #6 of horror movies: 'Curiosity Killed the Cast'."

"Wh-What's that mean?"

The Player grabs Filia arm and power walks his way over to the closet where the clothes were. He fits both himself and Filia inside of the small closet and tries to close the door but because of damage it was unable to shut all the way leaving it have a very small opening.

He tried his best to get it shut but to no avail. "Oh, come on. Close!"

"Player, what's going on?"

"Curiosity Killed the Cast, Filia. Investigating strange sounds is never a good idea, so we're hiding." He then blew out the candle so that the fire didn't give out their position.

Now that everything was dark, the only exception being the TV's static providing the only source of light in the room. The two friends stood, front-to-front, waiting for the singing to pass.

Moments go by but the singing continued and only got closer with each passing second.

"I'm gonna find you... I'm gonna find you. Hahaha!"

Filia began shaking uncontrollably as the voice seemed to have stopped at the bedroom door.

"Ready or not. Here I coooome."

The door opened slowly as the unidentifiable figure of a child holding a teddy bear stands there until the door hit the room wall. The child enters as the dragging sound of the bear followed the slow footsteps. The bear seemed to have some form of weight to it considering the amount of noise it was producing while dragging along.

Once the two peak out the small crack in the closet they could see a trail of red fluids leaking out the bears lower anatomy but that wasn't all, the eyes were gouged out with its face having the same red fluids trail down the cheeks, making it appear as if it was crying blood.

The bear had a center that was more spherical in shape, perhaps it was overly stuffed with some form of cotton, however upon closer inspection the shape looked as if there was a human head trapped inside.
Unable to deal with the pressure she throws herself into the Player's chest, shielding her eyes from the horrors. The Player comforts her by wrapping his arms around her, gently petting the back of her head, just below Samson, to keep her at ease. He watched on despite not wanting to see the sight himself.

"...Hahaha!" The child bursts out into laughter while checking the room. "Found you."

The Player's eyes widened at the statement. He was unsure if that meant the child was aware of their presence but he silenced his breathing as it walked out of the door's view leaving only the sound of footsteps to be his indicator.

There was loud banging out of view as if furniture was being tossed aside. A wooden table was seen flying past the crack of the door and it slams into the wall. Filia flinches at the sound and the Player holds her even closer, his heart beginning to race as the destruction got louder but then...nothing. Silence fell.

It was peaceful for a moment and the Player allows himself to breathe once more. He takes a closer look out of the small crack and just as he does the black child appears in front of the door.

"Hello." The child says with a minor echo in their voice, based on the appearance it was a girl yet oddly enough she wasn't facing the closet door.

The Player pulls his head back and lowers his head down to Filia's, closing his eyes in hopes that he wasn't spotted but the girl just stands there.

A few seconds pass and she begins to walk toward the television. The Player hears her footsteps and slowly turns his head to see what was happening only to witness the child crawl into the TV and disappears into the static.

The Player exhales and leans his back against the wall. He pats Filia's back for comfort. "It's ok... It's gone now."

She slowly looks up to him with terror in her eyes. "What was that thing?!"

"Hell if I know. Probably some demon child bent on revenge against people who killed her in the past."

He said that as if it was normal. Filia tries to understand how he came to that suggestion, as it was oddly specific. "How did you even come to that conclusion?"

"Don't you watch horror movies? That's usually what creepy kids are."

"Horror isn't really my thing, I'm more into romance."

"Damn. So you'll probably be the first to die since you're not aware of this stuff."

"What?!"

Probably wasn't the best choice of words and he realized this the moment he said it. "I mean... Stick with me and you'll survive. Have you ever heard of the 'Final Girl' trope?"

"N-No..."

"It's another trope in horror movies. Basically it means the last woman alive will confront the killer or whatever force is stalking us. Usually she's confronting danger with the male lead and since we're
together I assume we'll be the only two who survive the night."

The moment he finished his explanation a ghoulishly figured arm bursts through the closet wall, wraps itself around Filia's neck and pulls her back against the wall.

"AH! PLAYER, HELP ME!"

"FILIA!" The Player reaches out and grabs Filia's arms to prevent her from being taken. It was now a struggle between him and the violent haunting force. "Don't worry Filia! I got you!"

"I don't want to die like this!" She cries out.

"You're not going to die!" He assures her.

"Yes she is." A feminine demonic voice from the other side of the wall begged to differ.

"Who asked you?!" The Player exclaims and placed one foot against the wall to provide better footing for pulling.

The tug of war for the young girl continued but the 'ghost' was starting to win over the Player as the old wood began to give way. Strangely enough Samson was still sleeping. Filia wasn't kidding when she mentioned he was a happy sleeper.

Filia's life flashed before her eyes, or at least the parts she could remember since getting Samson, and what a short life it was. There was so much she wanted to do and the realization that it was soon going to be over made her eyes fill up with water.

"It's not fair! I have so much to live for! I never even got to love anyone!"

The struggle went on for just another second and the ghost arm briefly ceased. "Wait. You're a virgin?"

"H-Huh?" Filia asked while looking out the corner of her eye.

"You said you never got to love anyone. I assume that means you aren't sexually active as well?"

Filia looks at the Player and he looks back at her as if saying 'What the f&#k is even going on at this point?'. She then turns her attention back to ghost. "Um, yes? Or at least I think so. I lost my memory so-

"YES! She's a virgin." The Player stepped in to stop her from explaining.

"Well that won't do." The ghost pushed Filia away from the wall and knocks her into the Player. A shocked Filia looks back to the arm. "You're not going to kill me?"

"Don't you watch horror movies?" The ghost asked with its arm gestured as if it was shrugging its shoulders. "I'm not allowed to kill the virgin."

Filia, now completely lost, once again turned to the Player. "…?"

"I told you. Rules of surviving horror is real."

"It's basic stuff." The arm added, now gesturing that it was occupying a hip. The arm fades away and leaves the two alone.
The Player helps Filia up and dusts his clothes off. "Glad that's out of the way."

Filia steps out of the closet with her hair in a rut. Everything felt so surreal, her exposed eye even had exhausted eye bags under it. "Can we... Can we just go?"

"Hm? Oh yeah. Let's get out of here. First we need to find Umbrella, before that we should get back in touch with Squigly and Parasoul. We don't know what danger they may be in."

"Super..." Filia's tone was very monotone.

Meanwhile, in the east wing, Squigly was investigating what appeared to be the master bedroom of the manor. Unlike most of the house the room was nice and neat, with a single working lamp on the bedside. There was also a 1980's designed camcorder

By the window was a wooden rocking chair that kept a life sized male doll dressed in a tuxedo. It had this eerily realistic appearance complete with smile and arms upon the arm rest, appearing as if it were the only soul residing in the area.

"Leviathan, we've searched at least five different rooms and Umbrella still isn't showing up." Squigly comments with a saddened look on her face.

"We'll just have to keep searching. I'm certain she'll turn up eventually. This estate was far larger than I was expecting."

"Indeed." She nods in agreement. She walks pass a full-length mirror and catches a glimpse of herself. She stops in front of the mirror and gazes into her reflection. "...Say, Leviathan."

"Yes, milady?"

"Do you think I'll ever find someone?" She blushes out of embarrassment thinking her question was silly now that she asked it out loud. "I mean, it's just that... I never had the chance to love anyone and be loved in return. So even if I'm like this, as I am now, do you think somebody will take interest in me?"

Her question came as a surprise for the parasite and for a moment he wasn't sure how to answer but he's known his host for years and after spending so much time with her he's gotten to know a really fantastic woman, there was no doubt in his mind that one day her time would come.

The serpent coils himself around Squigly. "Of course you will, Squigly. How could you ever doubt yourself? You've sprouted into such a fine woman that any man would be crazy not to have an eye for such grace."

"Aaaaw, Leviathan. You always know what to say." She smiles happily and kisses the top of his head. "I'm sorry that question came out of nowhere but I got lost in thought. Silly me."

Lightning flashed outside of the bedroom window and thunder followed after.

The two look toward the window to watch the storm for a moment. "Hm. We should get back to searching." Squigly suggested.

"You're right. We have no time to waste."

Squigly turns about and makes her way for the door but as she reaches out for the doorknob she failed to realize the lonely rocking chair gently swaying back and forth. Before she could turn the doorknob laughter came from behind her. She turns around and sees that no one was there.
"Hahaha! Hey, you, pretty girl!" The voice was masculine and rather charming outside of the creepy laugh. It was also coming from under the bed.

"Leviathan..."

"Yes, I heard it too. Use caution, Squigly."

She nods and slowly creeps closer to the bedside.

"C'mere, little lady. Hehehe."

She got to the side of the bed and lowers down onto her knees with her hand slowly grabbing onto the bedsheets that covered the underside of the bed.

"You're getting cloooooser... Hehehehahahaha!" The sheets were pulled up just enough to peek but to her shock the doll was lying in wait with a crude, demonic face complete with a twisted smile, sharp teeth and multicolored eyes. "WILL YOU MARRY ME?!" He jumps out at her, wrapping his arms around her throat and dragging her under the bed. "HAHAHAHAHA!"

"Gaagh! Release me!"

"SQUIGLY! Augh! Unhand us!"

Now that Squigly and Leviathan were dragged under the bed the killer doll had them right in his trap. He grabbed a cultist ring and struggled to get his victim still so that he could slip it on, the ring was meant to corrupt the mind of the living so that they could be enslaved to do the bidding of the higher power in charge.

"HAHAHA! THIS IS A KILLER WEDDING! HAHAHAHAHA!"

After a minor struggle the shaking bed comes to a halt, the doll was successful in placing the ring on Squigly's finger. There was a brief moment of silence...

"We're engaged?" Her voice comes out from under the bed. "Heh...Hehehe...now that means you're all mine!"

"W-Wait, what?" The doll questioned. "Aren't you brainwashed?"

"No, but I'm thinking we should start coming up with names for our kids! I want at least ten kids!"

....

The doll desperately crawls from underneath the bed but was prevented from getting any farther thanks to Squigly keeping a nice tight grip on its tux.

"AH! NO! NO! NOOO! She's crazy!" Its demonic face was reverted but it was now turned into a face of horror.

Under the bed Squigly was donning a heavily psychotic yandere expression. Her smile slowly twisted into an overly attached grin. "You're leaving me after we just got engaged?!"

"LEAVE ME ALONE!" The doll cried out. "I'M ALREADY MARRIED! THAT'S NOT EVEN A WEDDING RING!"

"Leviathan, be a good boy and fetch!"
The doll looks back over its shoulder only for Leviathan to spring out from the darkness and coils around his neck. "...You shouldn't have done that." The parasite whispered to the poor soul who had unknowingly tapped into the dark corners of Squigly's mind.

Against its will the doll was dragged back under the bed, despite its best attempts to keep itself from going. The choking sound of its voice, along with its hands scratching the wood off the floor, truly revealed how terrified it was.

"NO! NOOOO! OH MY GOD!"

Now that it was back with Squigly the bed violently shook from the rough housing being done below.

"You're cheating on me after we just got engaged? Aaaaw, my dear...I'm gonna have to really teach you a lesson. Hehehe...hahahaha...HAHAHAHAHA!

Squigly's bright purple aura illuminated the floor, making the bed appear as if it had neon under lights. Whatever Squigly was doing to that unfortunate toy was only reflected by the sound of its cries for help which echoed into moonlit night.

Parasoul was checking all over the west wing for her sister, every door she came across was nothing but an empty space of cloth covered furniture. With every room she grew more anxious, stress levels rising. It was beginning to feel like she was running in a never ending loop.

Room after room, empty. After checking another room she grits her teeth and slams the door. She runs down the hall until she'd come across another.

"Where the hell are you, Umbrella...?" She finally reached another room and bursts the door open. ";...Another empty room!" She runs off once more. "Where are you?" She comes across yet another room and opens it to find nothing. "Damn it!" The cycle repeats itself which started to take its toll on the princesses mind. "Where the hell are you?!

She ran for what felt like hours. No matter how long she ran the corridor seemed to go on forever, even the rooms were beginning to appear the same. Just ahead of her was a lone door, she runs to it and kicks it open only to see that it was another long hallway with multiple room doors lined up along both ends of the wall.

Parasoul looks from side to side and collapses to her knees, punching the carpet in a shortage of breath. "I just ran through here... Am I going crazy?"

The combination of stress and worry plaguing the young redhead was taking its toll. There truly was something wrong going on but with how real everything seemed it was impossible to know if what she was experiencing reality or not.

A quick transition shows Parasoul running from room to room in search of her sister but every room she visited was just another peak into rooms she had already covered, the hallway repeated itself, putting the princess in an endless loop of searching rooms she's been to a dozen times.

She reaches the long hallway where the lone door waited for her. She runs through and sees the start of the corridor all over again.

Parasoul, now sitting against the wall, rests with her arms wrapped around her legs. "I'm not crazy... I'm not crazy... I'm not crazy..."

A look into the princess' psyche reveals she was running through the same process despite being still
in the real world making her believe she was still running through endless loops. The mental stress was consuming her, breaking her down.

Within her mind she crawls through the ever repeating corridors before finally laying down on her back. The phrase "Losing my mind" repeats, the chant appears to have prompted the hallways to move forward. Sending her along the illusion that the world was moving despite her being still.

To Be Continued
A Nightmare in Canopy Finale

Having run through an endless loop until having a mental breakdown Parasoul soon finds herself laying in a dark abyss. She is gently cradled by the darkness around her as it slowly pulls her deeper down.

"What's happening to me?" She asks in a weak tone while her eyes rest. "It...feels like I'm falling. Wait. No... Umbrella!" She awakens only to find herself in a void. "Where am I? What's going on?!"

"Don't worry." A mature and feminine voice from the darkness spoke out to her. "You're safe."

"Who is that? Show yourself!" She tried moving but found that she was unable to move her limbs. "Can't...move."

"Sssshh. It's ok, you're with friends now."

"What? What have you done to me? Where's Umbrella?!"

"So many questions. You're too beautiful for stress, if you're not careful it'll end up killing you."

"Just tell me where my sister is!"

"Hm. I suppose I could answer a few questions before the big day. Alright, starting with your first question: 'Where am I?' You're safely tucked away in a hidden chamber in the physical realm but here we're residing in the safety of your mind."

"My mind?"

"Mhm. Pretty dark, isn't it? You should start thinking happy thoughts and get some light in here. Now let's move onto the next question: 'What's going on?!' It's nothing really. Nothing you need to worry your little head about, think of this as donating to charity."

"Donating? What are you talking about?"

"Your body. Y'see, my family and I have been dead for years and can't make it back to the physical world without bodies. When your sister came along it provided the opportune moment to give my daughter a body."

Parasoul's eyes widened in horror. "You're planning to possess and use our bodies?"

"Something like that. Though I don't like to consider it as 'your' body, since it'll be completely mine by the time it's over."

The princess tried to move once more but it was futile, she remained still and forced to struggle fruitlessly. "NNNGH! GAAAH!"

"You shouldn't strain yourself, dear. You're in a state of sleep paralysis and it's having a direct effect on your mental well-being so struggling is pointless."

"You're...going to regret this!"

"I'm already dead. There's nothing to regret." Among the darkness a woman faded into being, though based on her appearance she was intangible. The woman was gorgeous in appearance. "Yes, a body worthy of my soul."
"So you're the one."

The ghost woman nods. "Indeed. How about your last question now that we're all caught up? 'Umbrella', was it? She's safe. Nothing you need to worry about. Getting to know her new soul mate." She giggles delightfully.

Parasoul grits her teeth softly and closes her eyes. Right now there was nothing she could do and she closes her eyes. '...Player, Filia, Squigly. I hope they're ok.'

In the physical realm Parasoul and Umbrella are seen together in a state of sleep. Their bodies were left hanging on two Trinity crosses, their arms and legs tied up to mimic some form of crucifixion. The area where their bodies resided was an odd, almost aquatic like, pink limbo, resembling a spectral space.

The Player and Filia run down a long corridor in the west wing in search of their friends.

"Squigly said she was looking into the east wing, right?" The Player asked while leading Filia down the hall with the newly lit candlestick.

Filia nods in response. "Yeah. But there's no telling how far she's ahead by now."

Just as the two run past one of the doors on the adjacent wall a loud thud was heard from the other side. Filia, being the last one to run past the door, hears the noise and turns around in a fright.

"Ah!" She screams and stumbles back into the Player who turned to see what was wrong.

He catches her and looks in the direction of the noise. "You heard that too?"

"Of course I heard it. What the heck was that?"

The Player moves Filia off to the side and walks ahead, making his way over to the door now that she was a safe distance. "Stay there."

"Be careful..." She tells him with her hands clasped together.

The Player approaches the door with his back against the wall, he took a deep breath and exhaled softly before placing his hand on the doorknob. He slowly turns the knob and once open the door is blasted off the hinges and crashes into the boarded up window. The Player jumps back and falls onto the floor at Filia's feet.

Following the explosive opening black and purple smoke emits from the room.

Filia gets onto her knees to aid her friend but to her horror, merging from the chaos, was a shadowy figure lingering in the smoke. The figure turns its head to the right thus emitting a red glare where the eye would be.

The duo sat frozen, the Player was dazed and all he could hear out of one hear was consistent ringing. Filia wraps her arms around his head to shield him from danger and closes her eyes to embrace whatever awaited her.

"Oh, hey guys!" A familiar voice spoke out from the smoke. Stepping closer to the pair the figure was revealed to be Squigly.

Filia immediately looks up and sees her friend. "Squigly? It's Squigly!" She jumps up and embraces her.
"Oof. Hey, Filia. It hasn't been that long since we've last seen each other." Though lost she wraps her arms around Filia and returns the hug. "What's been going on?"

The Player picks herself up with one hand over the ear that was currently ringing. "We've been encountering some real spooky stuff in this place so we came looking for you and Parasoul."

"Did you find Umbrella?" Squigly asked.

"No. Not yet." He answered. "Any clues on your end?"

She shakes her head negatively. "I haven't. I've only-" She then realized Filia was still clinging onto her and tries to get her off but she was like glue. "...I've only checked this hallway."

The Player's hearing was finally coming back to him but he wasn't sure if he heard that correctly. "Wait, you never made it past the first hallway?"

"Nope."

"What were you doing all this time?"

"I got engaged!"

"...What?" Both Filia and the Player asked. It was at that moment that Filia finally let go of her.

Leviathan scratches his cheek using the tip of his tail. "It's... It's a really interesting story."

Squigly held up her hand to show the ring. "Isn't it nice?"

The Player and Filia lean in for a closer look and it certainly wasn't a wedding ring. The two look to one another and then back to Squigly.

"Who are you engaged to?" The Player asked.

She steps aside and reveals the doll that attacked her earlier. It was lying face down on the door she blew down with its rear pointing upward.

"Apparently he was being less than faithful so I had to teach him a lesson."

"...Sienna, that's a toy." The Player bluntly states.

"He's more than that! He put the ring on me and asked me to marry him!"

A large sweat drop slowly traversed down Leviathan's head. Whether or not this was visible to everyone else was unknown.

"As I said... It's an interesting story." The serpent reiterated.

Filia took a closer look at the inanimate doll. "Why is there a giant hole in its butt?"

The Player sighs and shakes his head to dismiss the topic. "It doesn't matter. Let's just find Parasoul and Umbrella so we can get the hell out of here. We stick together."

"Right." The two girls nod in agreement.

Now that most of the group was reunited they ban together to brave the dangers of the spooky old house.
Meanwhile, back in the spectral like realm, Parasoul and Umbrella remained bound to their crosses. Within Parasoul's psyche she was slowly becoming consumed by the darkness that surrounded her. This darkness was the presence of the ghost woman corrupting her mental state, basically meaning she was gaining control over the princess, albeit very slowly. There was no telling how far gone Umbrella was.

Despite countless attempts Parasoul made no progress in escaping but she continued her to resist and move her body. "Nngh! NNGHHHHH!"

"I keep telling you that's pointless. Why do you continue to struggle?"

"I will NOT let you take my body!"

"You have no choice so stop making this harder than it needs to be. It's only a matter of time." She points to her legs and arms which were being consumed, the only thing left was her torso and head. "See? You're already halfway there."

Parasoul's expression remained stern, providing only a cold glare to the woman.

"Don't be so glum. You'll still be here, mentally, but I'll have absolute control over everything else."

"Just what exactly are you planning to do with our bodies?"

An interesting question for the woman, her only response being a casual smile but just as she opens her mouth to explain another human apparition appeared, this time it was a male.

He crawled his way into being. "Oooow... Oooooow..."

Hearing his voice the ghost woman turns to him. "Honey? Oh my goddess!" She floats over to the ghostly newcomer to see what was wrong. "What happened to you, dear?"

"The plan... It didn't work."

"What do you mean it didn't work? You failed to give the girl the ring?"

He shook his head. "No... No, I gave it to her but it had no effect on her at all."

"But that's impossible. The ring is supposed to make those among the living succumb to our will."

"I don't know /what/ that girl is but she confused the ring for a wedding proposal."

The ghost woman felt the need to get serious. "Beg your pardon?" She questioned with a raised brow and a less than amused tone.

"She... Augh! She thinks we're married and when I told her my heart belonged to another she was under the impression I was having an affair or- I don't know! She stuck things in me! I don't think I'll ever be able to walk again! ...The pain. The darkness. The memories... Make it stop!"

The ghost woman was overcome with raging emotions however she was able to remain calm and stands tall.

"...It appears I have home wreckers in my house." She looks over her shoulder with a menacing glare directed at Parasoul. "Alright, I guess this is the night bitches die."

The rage of a vengeful mistress gave birth to an unspeakable darkness that now consumed Parasoul at a much quicker rate.
Back in the physical world the Player, Filia and Squigly return to the open foyer in search of Parasoul. The Player comes to a stop in order to catch his breath.

"Phew... My god this place is massive. Felt like we were running for days. Is there any place they don't have?"

Filia took a moment to ponder on his question. "A laundry room."

"Wait, seriously?" The Player asked sounding surprised. "Huh."

Squigly was thinking of other things, mainly of the princesses whereabouts. "Guys, focus."

"Hm?" The Player questioned.

"We still have to think about where we're going to find the Renoir sisters." Leviathan clarified.

The Player snaps his fingers. "I knew that. Now where should we begin?"

"Perhaps there's a basement?" Squigly asks.

The Player mimics the sound of a game show buzzer the moment she asked. "Nope. We can skip all that noise."

"How come?" She asks.

"Horror trope." Filia answers.

Her answer made the Player smile. In fact he went as far as to pet the top of her head. "I'm so proud of you."

Before Squigly could offer a response the ground underneath them began to shake. The group were finding it a bit difficult to find their footing.

The center of the foyer erupts with a wooden uprising, the floor shatters and a massive pool of pink energy was now present, appearing to be the same source the sisters bodies were held. The trio back away in the nick of time to avoid falling in.

"What the hell was that!?" The Player asked after falling flat on his butt.

Filia picks herself up and rubbed the back of her aching head after flying into a wooden beam. "That hurt... Hm?" She looks up and catches an immediate glance of Parasoul and Umbrella standing on the railing at the top of the foyer stairs.

"Hey, look! It's Parasoul and Umbrella!" She exclaims to the others while pointing ahead.

The Player and Squigly are treated to the same sight and rise to their feet once more. "Hey, guys! We were looking for-" The Player's sentence was cut short once he was able to get a closer look at two, "...and those aren't our princesses."

"What do you mean?" Filia asked.

"Look, their eyes are red and there's an ominous dark aura around them."

Parasoul and Umbrella gives him a threatening smirk for being able to point out their condition but at the same time they were impressed with his ability to see that things weren't right.
The one controlling Parasoul claps at the Player's observation. "Well done. I'm surprised you were able to find out so quickly." The dual-tone voice was an even bigger indicator that something was wrong.

"Meh. It's pretty obvious to see honestly." He casually replied.

"What have you done to them?!!" Leviathan lashes out at the two, less than pleased that the kingdom's leader was under this new influence.

Possessed Umbrella directs her attention over the singer and her parasite. "We haven't done anything... Unless taking their bodies against their will to serve as new vessels for our family to leave this cursed prison counts. Does it?" The delivery of that question was obviously meant for sarcasm.

"Really? You're going to be a troll now?" The Player asked having instantly caught on to her sneering question. "Even when she's possessed she's an ass."

Possessed Umbrella sticks her tongue out at the Player to mock him for his comment.

"I was honestly hoping we could all be adults about this. I'm not a fan of rushing my plans because of side effects like this." In the middle of explaining Possessed Parasoul breaks character and the real Parasoul regains temporary control over herself, this was apparent by her eyes changing back to their regular amber color, "Ugh! Y-You guys have to leave! Quick! Leave this place and-" just like that she loses control and gets possessed once again, her eyes back to their red coloring. "See? That can be pretty annoying."

"You monster!" Squigly shouts in disgust. "I don't know what you're planning but it's not going to work!"

"That's right!" Filia concurs.

Possessed Parasoul flags her hand at the group in disinterest. "Whatever. Once I gain full control over my new body there won't be anything to stand in our-" She gets cut off by the straining force of Parasoul once again breaching through to regain control over herself, "Player, get everyone to safety! If you stay they'll get you too!"

The struggle for control was a scary sight for the trio but seeing this only made them want to free the princesses even more. The Player clenches his fist seeing Parasoul painfully transition from possessed to normal.

"Nngh! GAH!" The haunting spirit restores herself with minor panting. "Sorry about that. Controlling her is a real pain. I shouldn't have lost my temper... I only acted prematurely because some skank was trying to convince my husband that they were engaged."

"Sounds like a home wrecker." Said Squigly, clearly unaware of the irony.

The Player and Filia look to one another and sigh. "Squigly, you weren't lying, were you?" He asks now having his half-lidded gaze aimed for Squigly.

"About what?"

"The proposal thing."

"You still don't believe me? I even have the ring as proof!" She pulled back her long sleeve and revealed the ring on her good hand. "See?"
Possessed Umbrella was able to identify the ring in an instant and gasps. "Mom! Mom! Look, she has the ring!"

"What?" Possessed Parasoul looked down to Possessed Umbrella before the statement finally registered into her head. "What?!" Her eye fell upon the jewelry and it certainly was their family’s cursed ring. "...You? You're the one who has it? And you're dressed in that tacky wedding dress?!

"Tacky?!" Both Squigly and Leviathan respond in disgust.

"You little whore! I'm going to destroy you and feed you to the fish!"

The sparks were flying between the two women. What could've been a simple misunderstanding resulted in a heated fight to the death as Possessed Parasoul jumps off of the railing and rushes for Squigly. She performs a series of flips in the air before slamming the back of her heel into the wooden floor where Squigly stood. The impact was strong enough to create a massive dust cloud to erupt as a result.

It was revealed that Squigly was able to dodge the attack as she was now airborne and looking down to the large foyer.

Sighing was becoming a regular habit with the Player and he shakes his head knowing there was no way to avoid the fight. Filia stands beside him with her one arm crossed the other.

"They're really going at it." She comments on the fight like nothing was wrong.

"Eeyup." He agrees.

"Sooooo, what should we do?"

"We're going to get our friends back and then we're getting out of here. Sound like a plan?"

"Mhm!" She happily agrees with a bright smile.

Before the two could assist Squigly in her fight against the manor's mistress Possessed Umbrella jumps from the stairway and lands before the duo.

"I hope you don't plan on interfering with their fight." She was giving them the same threatening smile as her mother. "To get to her you go through me." She held her hands out and created dual fire balls, ready to cast them at the Player and Filia.

"Hey, Player, I'm not sure how we're supposed to beat her." Filia whispered to him. "I don't want to hurt her, she's so young."

He nods in understanding but interestingly enough he was also smiling. "Don't worry, Filia. Leave this to me."

"Huh?"

"I'll take care of this on my own. I have the perfect strategy."

Amused by the news Possessed Umbrella welcomes his challenge with a grin. "You'll only die trying."

One brief struggle later...

The Player had Possessed Umbrella laid across his lap while spanking her with his belt - his strategy
was proper discipline rather than resorting to actual violence.

"Ow! Ow! Ow!" Possessed Umbrella cried while being struck.

"Yeah, this was long overdue. Ass beatings all around." The Player remarks with a smile.

"It hurts!"

"As it should, you little shit."

Filia watched in genuine shock. She had no idea such a simple method would've been so effective against a hostile spirit. While all of this is going on Squigly and Possessed Parasoul were still going at it in the background.

Possessed Parasoul was relentless, as she should considering she didn't know how much time she would have until Parasoul took control again. She charges for Squigly and swings a heavy right hook for her face but Squigly was able to time the approach just right and dodges by moving her head to the left, the resulting punch, though it missed, had so much force behind it that it caused the wall behind Squigly to cave in under an invisible wave of energy.

Squigly takes this opportunity to recover and cocks back her right fist to aim an assault for her attacker however the speed of Possessed Parasoul was quite formidable - she was able to retract her fist and begin punching away at Squigly, who caught on to her impressive agility and prompts to block the oncoming punishment via crossing her arms in front of herself rather than attacking.

Seeing that Possessed Parasoul was beginning to make Squigly slide back Leviathan took action, from above he opened his mouth and breathed a massive stream of fire down onto the captive princess' head but she was able jump back before any serious damage could've been done. Squigly and Leviathan were now on the chase, thanks to Leviathan he propels his host forward creating enough momentum to close the gap between them.

The princess catches her footing and stops herself but seeing how close Squigly was she switches control over to Parasoul, "Augh! Squigly!" - she yells out.

Seeing that Parasoul regained consciousness over herself Squigly's eye widened and she prevented herself from swinging but this was exactly what the spirit wanted. Seeing her hesitation she repossesses Parasoul and strikes by kneeing Squigly in the gut. The strike caused her to let out a winded cough.

As her body arched back, Possessed Parasoul rotates around the staggered Squigly and grabs onto the back of her gown's collar, once the grip was nice and tight she 'dances' around with enough coordination to bewilder the younger fighter. She released Squigly and the two were turned back-to-back, Squigly turns around only to see her attacker coming through with a rounded kick, her reflexes kick in and she throws her arms up to the right side of her head, blocking the kick.

"What?!" She exclaimed in utter shock.

"That was a dirty tactic." Squigly grins at her reaction and thrusts her skeletal palm directly into her opponents chest which had enough force to send her flying back.

She soars across the room, over the spiraling pink pool, and then finally slams into a giant glass portrait of her former self. Once she hit the floor glass rained upon her backside.

Squigly maneuvers her head to the left and shrugs her left shoulder upward, producing the sound of a refreshing crack of the neck, she does the same thing on the right and exhales.
Possessed Parasoul picks her up and sees her daughter receiving a spanking from the Player. "Ah! What are you doing to my daughter!?" Parasoul was able to come through and witness the same thing. "What are you doing to my sister!??" Just to say that apparently...

The Player faced her while still keeping it up. "Something you two should've been doing a long time ago apparently."

She grits her teeth and stomps her foot. "Why you impudent little-! Release my daughter!"

Abiding her demands the Player unhands the young one. She tumbles over and lands on the floor with a sore butt. She slowly crawls over to her mother with tears flowing down her cheeks, they were comically fit as waterfall tears.

Squigly rejoins her friends and they congratulate her with a joyful reunion, she was rewarded with pats on the back and praise.

"Are you ok, darling?" Possessed Parasoul tries comforting her child.

"My butt hurts!"

"It's ok. He won't hurt you again."

"If she comes at me again I will!" The Player yells out from across the room.

Possessed Umbrella dries her eyes using her forearm and looks up to her mother. "Mom, why don't we just end them? We can get more vassals for dad later, and besides those girls are virgins. We can't kill them."

"They are? ...They're both the 'Final Girl' trope? But how? There's only supposed to be one!"

The Player looks over his shoulder at Squigly. "You're a virgin too?"

"Of course she is!" Leviathan answers for her almost immediately. He was like that protective dad who wouldn't allow anyone to touch his daughter.

Squigly blushes and caresses the side of Leviathan's face. "I died at a young age, remember? I never met the right one so- Yeah."

"Sweet. Then nobody is dying tonight." The Player states.

Squigly slouches over and looks off to the side as if staring at 'you'. "Seriously... Somebody needs to explain what the heck is going on." She mutters to herself.

Defeat wasn't an option at this point and getting Squigly for trying to make moves on her husband was a must, trope ex machina or not.

Possessed Parasoul punches the floor and causes a dent. "No! I refuse to let our only chance be for naught! We're breaking the rules and we're taking their bodies! Except the blue girl, we kill her."

"If that guy was honestly married to you beforehand then I don't want him." Squigly declared. "I was under the impression that he was having an affair with another woman after proposing."

Everyone was quiet and just stared at Squigly. Leviathan was looking off into space and pretending he wasn't even there.

From the left side of the dual stairs the doll in which the husbands soul possessed crawls out to reveal
himself. "You...Idiot..." He calls out weakly, directing his statement to Squigly. He crawls forward and ends up falling down the stairs until he was by his family.

"My beloved!" The wife calls out as she catches him in her arms before hitting the floor.

"Sorry about earlier!" Squigly exclaims with an honest smile. "It was just a minor misunderstanding!"

Possessed Parasoul snarls humorously at her with pupil-less eyes and sharp teeth. "Minor my ass!"

Squigly retorts with a shy cover of her mouth using her large sleeve.

"You...must be...desperate...for marriage." The husband weakly calls Squigly out.

"Pretty much." The Player agrees.

"Whose side are you on?!" Squigly stomped her foot at him.

While those two were having their bicker the family was having a reunion of their own.

"Don't you worry, dear. I'm going to make them pay for what they've done."

"No." The husband reaches out to his wife's hand and holds her. "We can't take their freedom from them, for they are so young."

Possessed Parasoul looks on, shocked, at her husband's response. "Honey, what are you saying?"

"We spent our time as spirits living in anger and hate. We terrorized those who entered our home for years but maybe now it's time we come to peace with what's been done. We cannot change the past and haunting those who are alive for something that happened years ago just isn't fair. I've had a long time to think about this... And I realized that spirits don't always have to be mean and violent, we're only empowering the stereotypes found in those cliché horror movies."

The wife and daughter look to each other with concurring glances. There was finally a time of peace and tranquility for them, the sight of this happy reunion made the Player, Filia and Squigly smile.

The husband then turns his words over to the young group of friends. "It wasn't until you came here that I realized this. Thank you all, your ways have really put things into perspective for me."

"What the hell did we do?" The Player whispers to Filia who elbows him in the side with just enough force to get him to stop speaking.

Squigly steps forward with her hands held together. "Really?" She asks with a gleeful smile.

The family looks out to them with a smile but quickly does away with that by reverting back to evil. "Hell no! Ever since you came here nothing has went our way! We're going to take your bodies and kill that blue girl!"

The trio of friends casually shrug to one another. "Of course."

The family focused their being into one and combined their spiritual powers to form a single soul. The fusion acted as a sort of exorcism for Parasoul and Umbrella as they did away with their physical bodies to perform this metaphysical technique. Powerful gusts of wind gyrate around the family as they evolved into a new creature.

The winds were so powerful that it caused the windows and doors to burst open, light erupting from
the new access points causing the place to light up immensely. The Player, Filia, Squigly, Parasoul and Umbrella were all thrown out the house and onto the spacious front lawn. The three friends were all conscious but the two princesses were still out from having their bodies liberated from the ladies of the house.

Once they recovered the Player looks forward but once his eyes were set upon the house he was shocked to find it had taken a monstrous new form, equipped with wooden arm-like appendages, a collection of sharp multi-layered wooden teeth and two windows emitting red light that served for eyes.

"Looks like we've gotten an extreme makeover!" The now sentient house spoke with a multi-toned voice, possessing the voices of the three family members. This fusion was known as the Chimera.

The Player looks to his left and sees Parasoul and Umbrella in their unconscious state, knowing this was sure to bring trouble he tries to think of a solution and friends only one option. He exhales and stands before the monster.

"Squigly, take the princesses to safety!"

"Huh?" She looks at the house and then back to the Player. "What about you?!" She questioned in obvious concern.

"We need them safe, they're the kingdoms future! Besides I got this so don't worry."

Their situation was pretty dire at the moment so there was no need to cause any more problems with a debate. Though initially hesitant Squigly gets up and rushes over to the Renoir sisters.

The house lets out a mighty roar at the Player who stands his ground without offering a single flinch. Filia picks herself up and stood at his side, braving the danger along with her partner. He was able to feel her presence without even having to acknowledge her movement thus making him grin. Now that the two were together a spark ignites within them both.

"Filia, it's time to power up."

"Already ahead of you!"

As the two became synergized two stripes of dark violet energy takes form and spirals around Filia - making the initial sequence appear as a double helix circulating around her. The energy helix erupts into a whirlwind that hoists Filia into a reasonably high height above the possessed house.

A dark cocoon forms around the girl but shortly bursts into a fiercely burning aura of her signature color. The two had successfully performed Heart-Sync.

With Samson asleep most of Filia's arsenal was locked away in inexperience but thanks to the Player's quick thinking he improvised by syncing their movements – He cuffed his hands out in front of himself, Filia, by proxy, innately mimicked his movement.

'Focus your power into the center of your palms, Filia.'

"Right!" She instantly responds and creates a small orb of their jointed power. Both Filia and Player throw back their right arm and pitches the energy like a baseball.

The small ball Filia made was tossed quickly and struck the roof of the house, instantly blowing a large chunk of its head off. It took considerable damage but recovers as Filia is descending out of the sky.
"AUGH! What was that?!" It exclaims, having not seen the attack coming.

Filia lands beside the Player and the duo look on pleased at the result. "You ready to try out the new upgrade?" The Player asks.

"With Samson sleeping it might be a little difficult but let's give it a shot."

"I don't know what you're trying to pull but this ends now!" The house raised its hand high into the air and slammed it down into the ground, causing a massive tremor.

The Player and Filia dodge to the left and right respectively and were temporarily separated.

'Gregor Wings!' He mentally called out to her.

The callout seemed to have influenced the aura around Filia creating four large wings that appeared where Samson would usually expand for Gregor Samson. The aura allowed Filia to take brief flight, having her soar high into the air but since the Player was unable to comprehend how the appendages work it was only good for one trip and the aura retracted itself.

Filia was now left to freefall out of the sky. The Chimera looks skyward and launches its hand upward in an attempt to catch her with the intent of squeezing the life out of her.

'Oh crap...' The Player was unsure of how to counter this since both he and Filia were unsure how flying worked thus preventing the aura from crafting Gregor Wings a second time.

While this was going on Squigly makes an impressive leap over the manor fence and enters the fray. "Leviathan, Dragon Breath!" She commands.

A massive stream of magenta colored fire is blasted from Leviathan's mouth and sets the Chimera's arm ablaze, it was enough to distract the monster for a brief moment, long enough for Filia to dodge out of the way by using her aura as a makeshift surface which she uses to kick herself out of the way.

"AAAHHHHH! What now?!" The Chimera yells as it was forced to watch its arm burn.

Filia plummets down to her friends, landing in the middle of the Player and Squigly, the aura veil prevented her from breaking her ankles, it was quite versatile.

"Sienna, you made it." The Player was happy to see she had returned.

She smiles back with a cute glare. "Of course. I wouldn't just leave you two."

"It looks like you were able to sync quite well without Samson." Leviathan comments.

"Yeah, we can still do it but without him Filia's potential is really hindered. I can improvise only so much and since I have no idea how flight works she's basically grounded."

"Aaah, that is quite troublesome." Said Leviathan.

"But she still has crazy good hops...which gives me an idea. Filia, I want you to tackle that thing as hard as you can and make yourself go skyward."

She nods and runs toward Chimera who was so busy trying to put the flame out on its arm it completely forgot it was in a fight.

"You really need to pay attention!" Filia taunts the beast to get its attention.
Once she got in close enough Filia crouches and shoots herself diagonally upward, piercing through the monster as a long thin stream of aura trailed behind her from the ground.

It felt like being shot with a bullet. The Chimera winces, placing its flaming hand against its wound, if it were an actual person with an arm of fire it would've cauterized the injury.

The Player was thrilled to see the plan was coming off to a good start. "Nice. Squigly, get Filia."

"Leviathan? Shall we?"

"But of course." Leviathan manipulates the lower portion of his body to take a form similar to that of a witch's broom.

Squigly takes a seat on what's essentially her parasites back and the two soar into the air to meet with Filia. They fly past the Chimera without being detected allowing Squigly to reach out for her friend. The girls lock hands and remain airborne thanks to Leviathan.

"Work together!" The Player shouts out to them so they both could hear, "Get inside that thing and really let 'em have it!"

Squigly tightened her grip on Filia's wrist and, with Leviathan, spirals around with so much speed that their bodies become indistinguishable, instead they physically resembled a spinning top rotating at a very high speed, Filia's Heart-Sync aura was even acting as a jointed veil for Squigly.

The two plummet down to the Chimera and pierces the house via the roof, the damage Filia caused earlier weakened it enough to ensure an easy break in. The beast roars out from being struck and now felt as if it was infested with a parasite that invaded its body.

The girls were shredding about various locations throughout the manor's insides, doing sever internal damage which was reflected on the outside as the Chimera's body was jerking in various directions with a loud 'boom'ing effect going off with each strike. Visible shockwaves even formed on the outside which helped the Player indicate where they attacked.

Large chunks of wood flew off of its body as the girls ricochet about. The Chimera is unable to take much more and ends up upchucking the pair who fly out of the front door while maintaining their spinning form until they realize what happened, thus breaking their grip and sliding back to the Player.

"Did it just puke us out?" Filia asked with a disgusted face.

Squigly was too busy trying to find her footing while trapped in a daze, she was experiencing a new level of dizzy. "Everything's...spinning..."

She falls back but the Player catches her and laughs playfully at her condition. "That was pretty awesome you guys."

The Chimera, less than amused, falls forward after enduring a great deal of pain. "DON'T GET COCKY!" Its shouting voice surely got their attention but the condition it was in spoke greater volumes. "Any last words before you die?!" More pieces of the house fall off of its being before it pulls itself out of the ground by using nothing but its arms. It slowly crawls over to the trio.

"Yeah. I think something comes to mind." The Player answers.

The beast was now towering over the three. In this new position it drops down and crashes into the ground where the three were standing in an attempt to crush them. The earth shakes from the mighty
impact and large clouds of dirt lingered from underneath the monster.

There was a moment of silence and the Chimera felt a great sense of accomplishment. "...That's it? Ha! HAHAAHA! YES! WE DID IT! WE KILLED THOSE SNOT NOSED LITTLE BASTARDS! HAHAAHAHA! Now, to claim our prize!"

Just as it got under the influence of victory the ground shakes once more much to the Chimera's surprise. Suddenly it was launched high into the air by a gargantuan aura manifested replica of Samson's true parasitic and hostless form.

The monster house is sent flying but was positioned facing the ground just in time to see the Samson replica looking at it from the ground. Once the aura opens its massive jaws the Player, Filia and Squigly are seen safe within the confines of the aura, revealing that the replica had protected them.

Leviathan, while he was inside the replica, revealed his muscular and bulky form.

"Trick-or-Treat." The Player states a one liner - that being his response to the earlier question 'Any last words before you die'.

Filia slowly turns her head to him with a squinted glare. "That was awful. You're awful."

"Shut up!" The Player flags her comment off and rolled his eyes, not feeling cool anymore. "Whatever. Leviathan, fire the damn beam..."

As ordered Leviathan lets out a quaking roar that unleashed a massive beam of Theonic energy. From a spectator standpoint it appeared as if the Samson replica was firing a mouth-beam, otherwise known as Atomic Breath, but the attack itself was a beam variant of Squigly and Leviathan's signature ultimate: Inferno of Leviathan.

The Chimera was blasted right through the center but the expanding energy beam would go on to consume its entirety, vaporizing the monster in one legendary blast. From a view of the planet's atmosphere the magenta colored beam is seen firing off into the exosphere but it slowly diminishes over the course of the next few seconds.

The three friends stand tall in case of a sudden return but it became clear that the fight was over and the threat was conquered. Leviathan reverts back to his normal form and the Heart-Sync aura around Filia fades away into millions of particles which blinked out shortly afterward.

Filia and the Player both collapse to the ground and fall back from total exhaustion. They laid out panting with smiles on their faces. Seeing them made Squigly and Leviathan share a warm laugh.

After the group recovers they make their way out of the large crater they were sunken into. Squigly was the first out and the Player climbs out afterward, he then went on to help Filia. While he was busy with that Squigly was shocked at what awaited them.

"I gotcha." The Player says after helping Filia out.

"Thanks. Jeeez! After this I'm going to need a really long bath."

"Tell me about it." He sighs.

Squigly takes a step back and freezes. "Um, guys?"

The two look over in Squigly's direction and were exposed to hundreds of people who were gathered around the area but also at a safe distance so that they weren't caught in the chaos. Children
and adults alike stood in complete and utter silence as they had apparently witnessed the entire event.

"…” Filia blinks twice without a word.

"…” Squigly and Leviathan stare out into the crowd with comically blank white eyes.

The Player bites his lower lip as if they were all in serious trouble. He exhales calmly and holds out his hand ready to explain. "Um-" He was instantly cut off by a thunderous applause from the many who gathered.

The people weren't scared, they were entertained. Among the various cheers one could hear "BEST HALLOWEEN EVER!", "WHAT KIND OF EFFECTS WERE THOSE?!", "WERE THEY USING WIRES?! I DON'T SEE ANY STAGE EQUIPMENT!", "DO YOU THINK THE BLUE GIRL IS SINGLE?!", among other things.

The trio weren't exactly sure how to react but they awkwardly stand with grinning faces as they wave out to everyone. It felt as if they were celebrities on the red carpet.

"This is really weird…” Filia whispered with a forced smile.

Squigly noticed the media was approaching and broke out into a minor sweat. "Helicopters and cameras are coming. I think I hear sirens too…”

"...Just smile and wave, ladies. Smile and wave.”

Not long after this Samson let out an extensive yawn. "Aaaaaw, damn! That was like the greatest nap I ever had." He says with a good stretch. "Did I miss the Halloween stuff?"

Hearing him made Filia, the Player, Squigly and Leviathan sigh heavily.

A NIGHTMARE IN CANOPY END

Three days after Halloween was over the hype surrounding the monster house attack was finally starting to die down but it would forever go down in Canopy history as one of the greatest moments witnessed by the public who were under the impression it was some form of show.

The Player, Filia and Squigly were able to keep their identities secret thanks to their costumes and thanks to that little detail no one knew they were the same individuals who were locked in combat.

The land in which the old house was built upon was sealed off due to the destruction and mess left behind. However, now that there weren't any souls haunting the area, reconstruction was planned to better suit the neighborhood, perhaps a playground for the children or new housing complexes.

The Player, Filia and Samson kept to their training and learning different ways to apply their Heart-Sync. The three worked themselves to the bone until they came to a satisfying result but ultimately they ended up draining themselves of power basically everyday.

Parasoul and Umbrella had no recollection of the night prior to being possessed but they still had to make full recoveries at the hospital, thankfully it was never anything serious. The Player and Filia visited the two sisters daily and their company was always welcomed by the Renoir's, unfortunately for Umbrella she was left to sulk every single day because she lost all her candy but this was quelled when the Player shared his earnings with her.

During their visits to the hospital Samson would often end up falling asleep, so when it came time for training they would skip the session and go home since Samson was a vital part of their practices, but
after a while they used that time to themselves and practiced solo syncing just as they did when fighting the Chimera. Each session strengthened their understanding for one another, but, like always, it took its toll and without Samson they found themselves tiring out much quicker than usual.

On an unspecified day the two are seen sleeping underneath a shady tree after an extensive learning session. Filia laid against the Player's shoulder which gave him the perfect angle to rest his cheek on the top of her head, making it appear that, even in sleep they were supporting one another, and in this case it was to allow comfortable sleeping positions.

After a wild October this was a well-earned rest.

A/N: Originally this chapter was longer, ending with a scene where Squigly confronts the Player on his call of keeping her away from the outside, as we know this is because of her appearance, not only that but she's the host to Leviathan -- which would get her executed, but since that seems like a major event I was planning on keeping that for another chapter. I still don't know if I want this Halloween special to be canon to the story or not, so I'm still debating on that, I swore I was going to have an answer by the time I was done but that clearly didn't happen so RIP me for thinking otherwise. I apologize for that guys, I'll still keep you updated on whatever I decide.

With that aside I wanted to talk on something in the chapter, namely the nature of the Heart Sync aura and it's fairly simply, the aura works in a similar fashion to how the Tailed-Beast chakra works for their Jinchuriki in the Naruto series, or how the Pokémon Reuniclus uses that green substance around its body. The Player has direct influence over this and can use it to provide a helping hand whenever someone he bonds with uses it, that is as long as he has some concept of how it actually works, he was unable to keep Filia in the air because he has no idea how wings work, they're not part of his anatomy so of course, it makes flight impossible without Samson, yet it can still be used for feats like super jumping as she did earlier.

I wanted to make Heart Syncing very versatile for the sake of coming up with new ideas for battles, I want to try making them as dynamic as possible, which is why I had it so that Filia was able to very briefly use it as a solid surface to jump out of the way of an attack from the Chimera. I'm not exactly sure I know how to explain that because it seems to only make sense in my head lol. Have you ever watched RWBY? If you did then I think that's where I got the influence from, the character Weiss Schnee can use a special ability known as Semblance and her semblance allows her to create glyph's which she can use for a number of things, including being used for solid surfaces which she can use to propel herself around the battlefield.

I'll have to try finding another way to describe it in the future because right now I feel as if I'm not making sense. Anyway, I think that's it for now so yay! I got a special done and I'm not sure if its going to move the story forward or not. Truth be told I didn't want to make it too heavy on action nearing the end so that's why the Chimera didn't really get a solid chance to fight back, that's why I decided on giving it a form that would be too massive to land any blows on Filia or Squigly who are really agile. Speaking of which, I based that design off of the house from Monster House, if you didn't see it then...probably don't go see it because I don't think it aged well but who knows what others may feel XD
Omake: Harmless Demands

We open to the Player sitting on the couch and enjoying a casual Saturday by watching TV. Actually he was just channel flipping through each station with a look of boredom, not really doing anything.

"And so they said 'Goku was the best Hokage of all time'. Pssssh...They got it wrong, sister. Luffy was clearly better during season 6." He was talking to nobody but himself and had multiple bags of chips open around the couch.

While in the middle of his...whatever this was, Squigly walks in front of the TV with her hands on her hips looking displeased with his current appearance. "Player, what are you doing?"

"Hey, Sienna. I was just tuning into one of my Japanese anime's – Cowboy Bebop,"

He says that but the currently scheduled program was an old war documentary.

Squigly rolls her eyes and sighs. "Can you at least try to keep the living room clean?"

"Ore wa chin chin ga daisuki nandayo."

"...What does that even mean?"

"I don't know. I'm bored."

"If you're bored why not read your lines for the next chapter?" She held up a thick collection of paper titled 'Script'.

The Player rolls over and buries his face into the leather cushion. "Nah. I don't really feel like it."

She sits the papers down on the table and crosses her arms. "It doesn't matter. I still have to talk to you."

"Sure, 'bout what?"

"About me! I feel like I'm being put on the backburner while you and Filia get all the attention."

Now this was interesting. The Player had to take a moment to pause and let it register that this was actually her concern, he turns over to face her. "What?"

"Don't pretend like you don't know. You two are always being at the forefront of everything. It's not fair. When will I get to do more important stuff?"

"What are you talking about? You are important. Remember you and Leviathan obliterated the Chimera we were just fighting."

"A victory that we don't know is canon!"

Thinking on it, yeah, she had a point. The Player squints his eyes while fishing for an excuse to counter this but nothing came to mind so he nods, though hesitantly. "Aaaah, true."

"Not only that, you keep using Heart-Sync with her and nobody else."

"I plan on getting to you eventually. I have to establish the basic fundamentals of it and Filia is known as a 'Practice Girl'. Other than you two who else am I going to use it with?"
"Ahem." A few throats were cleared from behind him. The Player rises from his lazy position and looks over the couch to see Cerebella, Parasoul, Ms. Fortune and Painwheel.

The Player knew they weren't happy but tried to keep it clean with a smile. "Hey, guys." He even gave a friendly wave hoping there wasn't any hostility.

"Don't you 'Hey, guys' us. Why have we been getting ignored?!" A less than pleased Cerebella asks.

Her sudden outburst caused the Player to retaliate with his hands held up in front of his face to prevent any potential physical assaults. "Whoa, whoa! You guys aren't getting ignored. Where's all this coming from?"

"Are you kidding me?!" Painwheel snarls with fire in her eyes, out of all the girls in the group she was the most tense. "I've only been in ONE chapter! I'm the most tragic heroine in this universe! I was expecting all kinds of development!"

Ms. Fortune nods in agreement. "I know I'm the comic relief but the amount of screen time I get is a CATastrophe."

...Yeah, no, that wasn't ok. Everyone gave her a look of disapproval but Ms. Fortune was waiting to see if anybody would laugh with her shifty eyes going back and forth among the crowd.

Parasoul turns her attention back to the Player after experiencing that painful ordeal. "We demand an equal share."

The princess was demanding this but it only came as a big surprise for the Player. "Parasoul? You're in on this too?" He questioned showing obvious concern, "You're always around and doing stuff."

"I've been reduced to a sidekick! You and I should've been the ones to save Umbrella during Chapter 5, not Squigly."

"That's rig-" Squigly was on the verge of agreeing but then stops herself once she realized what the redhead was saying. "WAIT, NO! That needed to happen because it aligns with my story. It made the most sense for me to go."

"Bull-Shit." Parasoul argued calmly.

"At least you're relevant to what's going on NOW, Squigly." Cerebella joined in. "You don't have a right to complain."

Painwheel gave Cerebella the stank eye after hearing her. "And you do? You have the best development out of everybody so far. Your chapter remains the most popular AND it's the longest."

"Don't hate on me because I'm good." Cerebella retorts with a cocky smile, actually with that in mind what was there for her to complain about? Especially since she seemed pleased with hearing this news.

Ms. Fortune rolls her eyes. "Doesn't change the fact that most people in the Skullgirls community aren't crazy for your character."

"Excuse me?" The performer flipped from cocky to defensive in a near instant.

"Yeah, you and your daddy issues. Nobody cares about that." Ms. Fortune clarified for her.

Painwheel shakes her head in disbelief. "How that's more popular than my character arc I'll never
"I don't like how this is suddenly being turned against me." Cerebella replies, now feeling that she was being ganged on.

"Fix your character and it won't have to be." Ms. Fortune responds with a bit of sass.

Squigly was unable to believe they were starting a /new/ argument and tapped her foot impatiently to see if it would correct itself but nope. "LOOK! The point is!" She jumps in to get the debate back on topic "All we want is more prominent roles." She directs attention back onto the Player.

"Ladies, please, I'm not the one who writes this stuff." He grabs the script from the table and gently waves it back and forth, he then points to the front page. "See, 'Written by: The Writer', my name's not up there."

Ms. Fortune leans over to Parasoul. "Did any of you find out what his real name is yet?" The princess had no clue and shrugs.

"But," he continues, having not realized Nadia whispered to Parasoul, "let's not forget that we're still in the early stages here. Have you seen the script we're working with? We have plenty more to do. You'll get your chance."

"Easy for you to say, you're a staple member of the cast." Painwheel remained hesitant.

"All in due time, Carol." He responds. "The pieces will align. You guys have your fans and they haven't forgotten you. Neither has the writer. We're all staple members and we all play our part. If anything happens to any of you then we wouldn't be able to move this along."

All of the girls face each other with looks of understanding. "I guess..." They all respond simultaneously.

"Filia still needs less screen time!" Cerebella continues to debate. "You two are practically a couple."

"No we're not."

"Yes you are." They all, including Squigly, retorts.

"We're not! It's been established it's not happening. How can you argue with that? Where is Filia anyway?"

...Suspiciously they all go quiet and not too long after this the closet door falls open and Filia hits the floor with a loud thud - she was tied up and gagged against her will along with Samson.

"What the-" He was shocked to see this. "Filia? How the hell you get in the closet?"

"I don't know but she's out now." Ms. Fortune playfully answers with a whisper toward the others who got a chuckle out of it.

The Player takes the gag out of her mouth so that she could speak. "Mah! Phew... I thought I was going to be trapped in there all day. I didn't even get a chance to read over my lines for the next chapter."

"See?! She's even going to be in the next chapter!" A distressed Painwheel exclaims, fearing that Filia was still getting unneeded attention.

The Player shakes his head in disappointment at the girls. "I thought you were all bigger than this."
Ms. Fortune flagged one of her hands at him while facing the other direction, she wasn't interested in hearing whatever he had to say. "Leave it to him to defend his love interest."

"How many times do I have to say it? It's NOT happening! N.O.T - NOT." He clarifies in mild annoyance.

Filia nudges her lips to the side curiously, it was beginning to feel as if he had something against her based on how he was going about this. "I've been meaning to ask about that. Why not? Am I not likable?"

"No. It has nothing to do with that." He answers. "The writer just wants to keep a general focus without getting sidetracked. Besides whoever they are doesn't want readers to feel as if you're just falling for me. I dunno, that's what I heard."

"Just falling for you? But there's a bit of chemistry." Filia replies sounding a bit puzzled. "We've had time to establish a genuine and believable partnership, which only seems to be getting stronger and more believable as the story goes on."

"They're probably just worried people will feel their waifu's are being taken away from them." He jokingly suggests.

His joke seemed to fly over Filia's head as she raised a brow. "What's a waifu?"

"It's nothing. Don't worry about it." He then faces the others. "Ladies, how do you feel about this? You think people would like to see pairings done?"

"WE DON'T CARE!" They all respond.

The Player flinches and covers one ear. "Geez... Fine. Ok, how about this? Let's discuss this over lunch or something? I'm sure if we write a list of changes we want done the Writer will give it some consideration. Sound good?"

"Are you treating?" Cerebella asked. "I'm almost positive you're the one with the biggest check, Mr. 'Hero'."

The Player lowers his eyes, giving her a dull glare. "I'm not getting paid at all."

The girls give it some thought and they all come to a consensus, but of course, who would pass up a meal?

"Fine." Cerebella speaks up for the group, now leading them out. "I'm choosing where we're going."

"Whoa, whoa, Cerebella!" The Player grabs his hoodie and rushes after her. "We're only going out for lunch...ables."

"Does anybody have a piece of paper and pen?" Squigly asked. "I have a few things in mind I want changed."

"Not before you put me down for getting a chapter of my own!" Painwheel immediately declares.

Filia noticed they were all leaving and looks around to see if anybody was going to pay her any mind. "Um, guys?"

Ms. Fortune casually placed her hands behind her head and follows after the group. "After my fight with Cerebella you'd think I'd be in for a few more actions scenes. With how my body works the
"Oh yeah? Well just because I'm a princess doesn't mean I can't be funny." Parasoul makes conversation with her as she steps over Filia. "You know I was originally going to have a bigger role by having 'Salty Parasoul' serve as a way to bring more humor to the table? It would've been refreshing to see since my character is usually always serious."

Filia rolls over to her front and was forced to watch the group leave without her. "H-Hey! Wait! Guys! You're forgetting-!" The sound of the door closing cut her off. "...me."

A/N: I know this is super random but I've always wanted to write an omake. Honestly it just feels like I want to try my hand at everything lol.

Let me not beat around the bush: So apparently there's a quite a few who actually like the idea of Player x Filia shipping and this honestly came as a surprise to me. You see, when I read fanfiction where the author has their OC being paired up with an already established character of a series and readers usually pan this writing choice. I felt that if I ended up doing something along those lines then readers would feel I was just following the trend of making characters love my OCs so I was adamant on keeping the focus strictly on story/friendship/humor but as I went on I was beginning to see that people supported the idea of pairing's. I was never against the idea, I was just afraid of it.

This omake was a jab at myself btw XD
Snow finally arrives in the Canopy Kingdom. Blanketing the landscapes in layers of white embrace school was out for the holidays and the final rush of the year was upon the citizen. The kids were happy but the adults weren't too fond of all the work that needed to be done, especially when trying to traverse in traffic in the persistent weather storms, but nevertheless the atmosphere was full of the holiday spirit, decorations of horror and fright were no more and replaced with love and warmth as were the themes for Christmas.

New Meridian
December 24th, 11:45am

The Player, Filia and Squigly were out at the park with Umbrella and a lone Egret who went along to make sure the princess was protected and chaperoned. With the change of season the group were outfitted into their winter clothes: The Player was wearing a black high collar jacket, skull cap, blue denim jeans and a pair of beige boots.

Filia had a cream pea coat, white scarf – matching with her slouch beanie. Her uniform skirt was visible from the bottom of her jacket, thankfully she had something on her legs: black leggings and of course her blocky shoes.

Unlike her friends Squigly only needed her trench coat and not much else, sporting her regular iconic red, white and black attire underneath her heavy winter suited garment. She kept a pair of gloves on, not for keeping warm but to have an excuse for covering up her skeletal hand, typical precaution.

The girls were all making snow angels by the playground playset and the Player was minding his own and making snowmen by the teeter-totters.

"On the first day of Christmas the Skullgirl sent to me: A girl with a parasite." He was actually singing a whimsical holiday tune while making his snowman "On the second day of Christmas the Skullgirl sent to me: two busty melons and a girl with a parasite. On the third day of Christmas the Skullgirl sent to me: three annoying tasks, two busty melons and a girl with a parasite. On the fourth day of Christmas the Skullgirl gave to me: four massive feels, three annoying tasks, two busty melons and a girl with a parasite. On the fifth day of Christmas the Skullgirl sent to me: five Heart-Syncs, four massive feels, three annoying tasks, two busty melons and a girl with a parasite."

In the middle of his song a snowball struck the back of his head, immediately stopping him in the middle of his Christmas cheer. He slowly turns around with a squinted glare at the girls who were acting as if nothing happened.

Finding a culprit wouldn't have been possible since they were acting so casually so he turns back to the snowman, letting the first incident slide. "On the sixth day of Christmas the Skullgirl-" Just as he got back in song a second snowball struck him. He reacts just as fast to the strike and faces them. "Would you guys cut it ou-!" He was stopped by three snowballs hitting him in the face like a burst fire shot.

"Hahahaha!" Umbrella was hysterical, holding her sides with one hand and pointing to him with the other. "Did you guys see that? We destroyed him!"

Squigly covered her smile with her sleeve and giggles adorably. "Hehehe. He never saw it coming."

"Maybe three snowballs back-to-back like that was a bit much?" Filia questioned while also
snickering mischievously.

Umbrella flags off Filia's concern with a hefty "Pssssshaww!" - she was now placing one hand on her hip and the other held up with her index finger extended. "He'll be fine. No harm in a little fun. Right, Player?" She was instantly silenced by an aggressive headshot fired upon her forehead the moment she turned in his direction. Umbrella collapses to her knees and lands face first into the snow.

Filia and Squigly were shocked at how fast the snowball came but they waste no time in going to aid the princess. "Umbrella? Umbrella!" Filia called out her name while shaking her.

"PaRaSo000Uuuul, get yer...hyper boobs...off...my head..." The young princess spoke in a daze. She was ok, thankfully it wasn't serious though it didn't change the fact that the blow was solid.

The two girls exhale in relief but a sinister presence made their skin crawl while sensing its very being, an uneasy shiver made its way up the girls spine and made them feel they should prepare for the worse. Filia and Squigly look up ahead of them and see the Player duel wielding snowballs.

"You both know this means war, right?" He asked them with a vengeful smile. The two had never seen this before and made them want to look back on their actions and wonder if it was worth it. It was only a few seconds ago.

**Canopolis**
**12:00pm**

While all this was going on Parasoul was out in town looking for the perfect Christmas gift for Umbrella in high end toy stores of the kingdom's capital. She was at a local toy store browsing the aisles with Molly, her presence caught the attention of practically everybody and they marveled at their leader as if she were a celebrity, taking pictures and gossiping though the crowding citizens didn't seem to have an impact on her.

"Hmm... Molly, which do you think Umbrella would prefer?" She held two toys up to the communications officer. To her left was a girly baby doll and on the right was a girly pony plushie. Molly took a gander at both and tried her best to think what young Umbrella would pick but knowing her she'd just both, money wasn't a factor but if she had to choose... "Um. I'd say...go with-"

"No, she wouldn't like any of this." Parasoul unintentionally interrupted her and placed both toys on the shelf making Molly sigh under her breath. "What am I thinking getting her these things? She's getting older. I can't baby her with childish toys. What would mother do? Maybe she'd prefer one of those cars she can drive around? Do you think she'd like that instead?"

Now that she had the princess's attention again Molly perked up to appear as if she wasn't tired. "M-Ma'am?" In fact she wasn't really paying the situation much mind based on that response.

"Do you think Umbrella would like one of those miniature electronic cars to drive around in? I think that would be better than these toys for a girl her age."

"Your Highness, you've been running around Canopolis looking for the perfect gift for Princess Umbrella since 7am, you shouldn't stress yourself about it." Molly said in hopes of easing her active mind.

Parasoul thought about it but figured it wouldn't be good enough. Christmas was right around the
corner and she couldn't find a gift for her sister. "No. I must find her the perfect gift. How can I call myself a good sibling if I'm unable to do this?"

"You're being too hard on yourself."

"It's not about me. It's about Umbrella... I can't stop until I have something for her."

Her words have earned her verbal praise from the surrounding citizens, "Princess Parasoul is so loving and caring!", "She puts her sister above herself. She's such an inspiring woman...", "My friends won't believe I'm shopping in the same store as Parasoul!", and so on. The people seemed to really love their leader.

Molly, who seemed to be the only one who noticed the attention of others, peers her eyes over to the side as she heard the chatter, it was probably best Parasoul stayed home while she and the rest of the Egrets handled the shopping but knowing her it would've been difficult.

"I understand, your Highness." Molly swallows her former thought and provides a supportive, yet very unique, zigzag smile. "I just hope princess Umbrella isn't drawing this much attention."

"Attention?" Parasoul questioned.

Did she really not notice? Whatever the case may have been Molly nudges her head to the side which Parasoul follows, NOW she was seeing the surrounding crowd snapping pictures and just watching gleefully from both ends of the aisle. Holiday shopping wasn't even a thing anymore for them.

"You've earned quite the following since we arrived, your Highness."

"I-I see... I'm sure Umbrella is fine. I left her with the Player. I doubt they'd do anything to draw any unwanted attention to themselves."

…

New Meridian, Public Park
12:30pm

The group ended up transforming the park into a warzone, multiple snow walls were crafted on the left side of the park to serve as cover, while on the right a giant snow fortress was created, physically resembling that of a medieval castle on a much smaller scale.

Umbrella stood at the top of this castle with a crown on her head, a cape around her shoulders and a royal scepter. No telling where she got all that extra gear. "Hahahahaha! I'm queen of THIS castle! You peasants dare stand before me?!!" Umbrella questioned under the influence of immense power.

Standing around various points of the castle were Squigly, Filia and a single Black Egret. Opposing them were the Player and his forces: Cerebella, Feng and Nadia, all wearing their appropriate winter attire, even Vice-Versa was taking the appearance of a skull cap.

"Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears;" The Player spoke to his group like a captain to his soldiers "A great war is upon us... Even as I speak our friends are out there, fighting for their freedom."

Feng leans over to Cerebella with one hand held up to her mouth. "Um, what is he going on about? We only came here for the Christmas cookies he promised."
While she was talking their audible variant of the Player's speech was 'Wah wah wah wah wah wah wah wah'.

"I...don't know. He goes overboard with just about everything." Cerebella was just as lost as Feng. She also noticed all the local children running in fear because of this which made her shake her head in disapproval, leaving her to wonder what she got herself into.

"They may take away the Indiegogo campaign but they will NEVER take away our option TO GET A SEQUEL!" He continued to declare in a masculine tone. The girls, except Nadia, had zoned out a while back so whatever he was getting at didn't register for them.

"PREACH!" Nadia cheered.

Seeing this amused Umbrella but now it was time for action. The young Renior jumps from the fort and lands on the snow bridge they sculpted, Squigly, Filia and the Egret all land beside her, ready for a brawl.

"Off with their heads!" She commands like a queen.

It was on. Squigly kicks at the ground with enough force to have a wall of snow rise in front of her, she throws her palm forward and sends a barrage of snow pellets soaring at the enemy.

The Egret, taking this a bit too casually, gets down on his knees and creates one snowball, once created to perfection he tossed it over.

Filia was already holding two snowballs in hand and throws them as hard as she could.

Cerebella sees the incoming assault and pushes the Player out the way just in time. Realizing she wouldn't have been able to dodge in time she tanks the snow pellets Squigly had thrown to the chest, her puffy jacket could be thanked for that, and then punches away the three snowballs that followed afterward.

The Player recovers and sees the efforts Cerebella had put in. "Nice job, iron melons!"

"Don't push it." Cerebella narrowed her eyes after shifting her gaze at him.

"Right, sorry." He smirks before standing.

"So you invited us to a snowball fight rather than an actual Christmas gathering?" Feng asked with a clear look of disappointment on her face. "Why am I not surprised."

"If we win you WILL get cookies." He assured.

This was all the motivation Nadia had to hear so she jumps over one of the snow walls with a snowmade katana in hand... "I'm getting those cookies!" - she was really into this.

Now there were even more snowballs coming at them, seeing this Nadia uses the katana to destroy each of them by using swift and coordinated swings, basically a more advance version of Feral Edge without the tail, but Umbrella's team was relentless and chucked even more.

Nadia performs a crouching wide swing and repels most of the snowballs but three more were heading her way. Feng leaps over her and kicks the first snowball into snowflakes, protecting her partner from the attack. Feng goes on to perform a quick round kick and destroys the remaining two.

It was their turn to attack and Cerebella decided to just go along with it. Using Vice-Versa she creates
two large snowballs, actually they were more like cannonballs, and tosses them both at Filia with great force.

Seeing these two massive snowballs coming for her Filia yelps in a high pitch tone and dodge rolls to the side BUT it came at the price of the Egret taking the hit; one to the gut, which made him cradle his abdomen, followed by a blow to the face, putting him onto his back, thankfully it was only snow.

Filia recovers and exhales in relief. "Filia, what're you doing?!" Samson questions, "Look above you!" She does just this and sees Nadia coming down with the snow katana, Samson acts for his host and propels her forward to make it appear as if she acted on her own.

Nadia struck the ground, interestingly enough her weapon didn't break, but she reacts quickly and chases after Filia in her helpless state, having the intent on striking her back. Filia turns around just in time to see that the katana was coming down for her.

Samson extends his arms and catches the katana by slamming both his palms into the 'blade', preventing Nadia from hitting her.

Seeing this took the Feral by surprise. "Whoa...!" She exclaims.

"Oh no..." Filia expressed concern thinking she was going to catch on that she had a parasite.

Nadia was perplexed by this turn of events but her look of shock turned into excitement. "You can control your hair? That is so cool!"

"E-Eh?" Filia was lost but her expression was quite funny, it was the complete opposite of how she thought Nadia would react.

"You're like Millia Rage from Guilty Ge-"

Her observation was cut short as Filia grabbed Nadia by her jackets collar, Samson provided assistance once again – growing out his legs and jumping back so that he could curl them all into a reverse spiraling hairball. Once Filia got to the ground she was able to perform an effective tomoe nage throw, using the momentum Samson created to send Nadia flying back to her team.

Squigly jumps high into the air and tosses two snowballs at Cerebella, who was distracted Nadia getting thrown into one of their solid snow walls, luckily she regains focus and catches wind of Squigly's assault in the nick of time. She performs a backflip and dodges the two but once she got back onto her feet her gut was met with a superpowered throw by Leviathan who had snuck a throw from Squigly's eye.

"If we're getting Living Weapons thrown into the mix I think a little help from our parasites is fair." Squigly taunts under her breath while holding a challenging grin.

Cerebella was sent sliding back across the snowy battlefield, she was basically being used to shovel a single pathway from where she was previously standing, and in comes the Player on a snowboard, improvising a kick flip over Cerebella's body and landing on the smooth trail she left behind - using it to speed his way over to enemy lines. Looking in the background he actually made a snowboard ramp to gain the speed he acquired, he was doing it while the girls were buying time.

"Where did he get that snowboard?" Filia asked.

Squigly scratches the back of her head unable to find an answer herself. "Wish I knew..." But this wasn't the time for thinking, Squigly was still in battle mode and threw a snowball at him.
The Player ducks under the ball and continued speeding toward his friend who was surprised at how fast he was able to close the gap. He crouches low and leaps high into the air, aiming the board for Squigly's head but she crossed her arms and blocked the attack.

"Whoa! What're you doing?! It's a snowball fight!" She tried to explain, now wondering why he would try and strike her with a snowboard.

"I just wanted to try and be cool." He admits before kicking off of the board and causing Squigly to get knocked down. Unlike everyone else he sucked in combat so rather than actually sticking the landing he backflips and falls flat in the snow. "Nngh..." He picks himself up and shakes the snow out of his face, "That could've gone better." - he mutters.

And how right he was because Umbrella was on the attack now, she took to Nadia's strategy and crafted a snow variant of a weapon but it was a blunt object; specifically a spiked bat.

The Player looks up just in time to see her plummeting out of the sky with the weapon, he reacts hysterically and crawled desperately in the other direction, lucky for him he just barely got away however she struck the ground with enough force to cause a large snow geyser, the impact forced the Player to fly off into the distance, returning him to the opposite side of the field.

"HOLY S#!T SHE'S STROOOOOOOOONG!" He cries out as his team watched him fly off farther behind their lines. The sound of his body slamming into a dumpster could be heard.

The snow from Umbrella's attack falls down and blankets the center field. "My sister's training paid off." She boasts.

"We'll see about that!" Feng declared while taking cover behind a snow wall, she had a stack of snowballs ready to go.

One by one the snowballs were thrown and Umbrella had her sights on the next target, She rushes in and strikes each snowball with her bat, slashing from left to right as if it were nothing. The young Renior's impressive reflexes influenced Feng to throw even harder.

Seeing that things were heating up Umbrella had to take it a bit slow, opting to walk the rest of the way to keep better focus. The princess was performing consecutive 'Behind the Back' and 'Around the Neck' into full 'Neck Roll' swings, preventing the snowballs from headshots which was what Feng was going for, she was treating the bat as if it were a bō staff.

Her training certainly has paid off considering she was able to parry each and every one of Feng's attacks, and before the Dagonian could react Umbrella swings the bat across the side with enough power to make Feng's eyes turn into two large white circles, her lips poking out to show that she was definitely feeling the power of the attack, she even made the sound of a squeaky toy being pressured.

Once Umbrella finished she sent Feng soaring like a missle and destroyed the cover she was behind. The Player got himself out of the nearby dumpster only to have Feng fly into him and force him back in, this time he had company, the large lid closed over them after they were both inside.

With the Player, Feng and Nadia recovering it was up to Cerebella to carry the team who, out of shot, crafted two solid snow gauntlets and rushes for Filia.

Filia's shock at Umbrella's physical capabilities was short lived as she spots Cerebella out of the corner of her eye which immediately put her back on defense, though once she got her full attention she freaks out that Cerebella had such massive gauntlets around her fists. She threw her hands up and blocked Cerebella's straight punch.
"Gyah!" She strains to keep her footing while being pushed back slightly. "Seriously, how do you guys keep making these in such a short time?!

"Can't talk. Fighting." Cerebella replied.

The gauntlets weren't all she had to worry about, Cerebella snuck in a right high kick which Filia dodges by ducking, getting low enough to grab a handful of snow and shove it right into Cerebella's stomach, poor girl that was all she could do, though taking a direct hit Cerebella retaliates with a left hook, punching Filia in the face with her gauntlet.

Filia stumbles back with a large snow imprint on the side of her face. "H-Hey! You don't have to treat this seriously, Cerebella! It's a snowball fi-!

Cerebella wasn't hearing that noise and cut Filia short with a jab to the gut and a right swing to her left cheek. Now Cerebella just figured since she was still using snow to attack then her efforts were valid but the keyword here was snowBALL.

Filia spins around in a daze unable to comprehend what she had gotten herself into but this didn't stop her from reaching into her coat pocket and withdrawing a handful of hidden snow, "Pocket Snow..." she wearily states before tossing it, unfortunately for her Cerebella side steps it and diagonally back slams her left gauntlet upon her head, there was a brief flash of Samson reacting to the attack with gritted teeth and swirly eyes, following up on the last attack was a pretty intense uppercut which was strong enough to shatter the gauntlet off her hand and send Filia high into the air.

"D-Damn! That hurt!" Samson shook himself out of his daze. "Filia, get your ass back in the game! I'm gonna handle this!"

"ThE SsssTaaarRRssss...sO pRETtY...SamsON." Filia deliriously responds with miniature planets and stars orbiting around around her head.

"Crap... She knocked what little brains you had left right out of ya."

Filia free falls out of the sky and lands in a large pile of snow which broke her fall. "I don't wanna play anymore..." She mutters while face down.

Cerebella grins at Filia's defeat but it wasn't over. Umbrella was coming to take charge and get payback for her fallen comrade. Knowing this kid was no push over Cerebella puts on her game face and charges in her direction.

"Hyaaaaaaaaaaah!" Umbrella let out her war cry.

"Aaaaaaaahaaaah!" Cerebella was performing a similar act with her remaining gauntletat the ready.

"Hyaaaaaaaaaaah!"

"Aaaaaaaahaaaah!"

"Hyaaaaah!

"Aaaaaahah!"

"Hyaa-!"

"Aaaa-!"
Their boots meet in the center, weapons held back and ready to be unleashed, time was slowing down for them as it came down to the wire: bat vs glove. The two objects clash but Umbrella seemed to prevail over Cerebella as the bat penetrated the snow around her fist. Umbrella swung the bat upward and struck Cerebella resulting in a shockwave making a brief appearance before she was sent flying.

"WAAAAAAAAAAAAAAa-!" Cerebella was sent so high that once she got far enough she blinked out via a small star twinkle in the sky. The farther she got the less you could hear her scream.

That's not to say Cerebella didn't do anything. Umbrella's snowbat slowly chipped off until it all came 'poofing' off all together, revealing that she covered Hungern, her living weapon, in snow to coverup the fact that she wasn't playing fair, this was where all that power was coming from.

"Oh, come on! You can't be using a living weapon!" The Player shouts after realizing this.

Squigly crossed her arms at him, "Why not?" - she questioned "If I remember correctly your friend used hers."

The Player was going to retort but this was true, evident by the Egret who was out for the rest of the match. "Yeah, well, you and Filia used your para-" A snowball was thrown and slapped him dead center in the face, silencing him from spilling crucial information. "...I deserve it."

"Maybe we should've declared some rules beforehand..." Nadia spoke up but the game was null at this point.

Umbrella placed Hungern over shoulder and swiped her finger across her nose. "Heh! It was a blast regardless."

"-aaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAH!" Cerebella's screams returned from the sky, just like her body, and she comes crashing down into the snow fortress Umbrella and her team created.

The harsh landing results in the snow erupting skyward, soon it showers down upon the area and covers the entire playground in a fresh new coat.

After the fall Cerebella digs herself out of her wintry grave and rises to her feet. "I'm alright! I'm..."

The first thing she noticed was that everybody was covered in snow because of her. There was a moment of silence but she soon bursts into laughter seeing everyone's less than pleased expressions while looking like a pair of snowmen.

Laughing was contagious but it wasn't just that, seeing each other covered in snow and looking back on the reason behind their fight only made it funnier, the Player, Filia, Squigly, Feng, Nadia and Umbrella join Cerebella with joyful laughter.

Now that her sides recovered Nadia sighs, getting on all fours and arching out her back for a good stretch. "Well, it was fun guys but I should be heading out. Got a lot of decorations to hang up around Yu-Wan's."

Cerebella nods in understanding. "I hear ya. Feng and I have some things to take care of back at the circus so we're going to be heading out too."

"Aaaw. It's been so fun, guys. Painful but fun." Filia laments them having to go their separate ways but it was getting late and a lot had to be done, no point in keeping them from their holiday plans.

"We've got work to do too." Squigly placed her hand on Filia's shoulder to remind her of their plans. "Y'know." She gestures her hands as if mimicking gift wrapping.
"...Oh! That's right! Not sure how I forgot about that. Hehe."

"Forgot what?" The Player asked.

"Nothing." Filia replies with a straight face only to break into giggles over to Squigly.

He squints one eye at her and shrugs. "Eh. If you say so." He then directs his attention to the others and waves goodbye. "Cerebella, Feng, Nadia, we can have those cookies I promised tomorrow. That is...assuming Santa doesn't eat them all."

Most of the girls around him nearly broke out into laughter, but Cerebella found this particularly funny and points a judgmental finger at him. "Dude, you still in Santa Claus?"

"...Santa isn't real?" Umbrella asked innocently.

"We're in a land where shark people walk on land, a little girl with unimaginable power terrorizes the mafia, a zombified opera singer who got back for days-"

Knowing who he was referencing Squigly covers her backside and blushes, it was made even worse now that his observation had the other girls acknowledging her shapely rump. "Hey!" She cries out.

"She got a booty?" Feng whispered to Nadia.

Nadia had on a pair of shades and bit her lower lip. "She doooooo..." She answered after getting an eyeful.

"-and let's not forget the whole 'skull that grants wishes' thing." He finished. "I don't think it's too farfetched to believe in Santa while I'm here." For him that may have been the case but for the girls this was everyday life so they couldn't relate, the whole Santa Claus thing was still silly for them no matter how tried to phrase it since he didn't exist there either, just a kids tale.

"Suuure, sure." Cerebella responds in an uninterested tone, practically dismissing him but she meant no harm "We're gonna go. Good luck with capturing your leprechauns or whatever." but she did still enjoyed teasing him. "C'mon, Feng."

"Ok, Cerebella. I hope you all enjoy your holiday." She wishes everyone the best before departing with her best friend.

Nadia waves back, returning the cheers. "Same to you. Stay safe! ...Hm. Y'know, she's not so bad." She said now turning her attention back to the Player and the girls.

"Who?" He asked.

"The one with the strange hat. I was almost certain the next time we met it would've ended in a fight but she appears to be doing a lot better now. A lot less tense."

The Player understood what she meant and he was reminded of what transpired all those months ago, back when Cerebella was actually considering taking the life of another for the sake of Vitale's happiness.

The intensity of that moment still remained but seeing how she's developed since then made him smile. "Yeah. You're right."

Filia only remembered taking a snow gauntlet to the face and rubs her cheek to soothe the area Cerebella struck. "Speak for yourself..." She mutters to herself.
"And thanks for inviting me out. It was completely random but I had a lot of fun!"

"I didn't really know anybody else and just happened to run into you before it all went down." He admits to the feline.

Rather blunt wasn't he? Nadia's head drops at his honesty but she picks herself back up, maintaining the same smile despite his wording. "Well, it's the thought that counts. Try not to be a stranger, we're friends after all."

"Huh?"

She gently punches his shoulder in a friendly gesture. "Yeah. You and I, we're friends. Do I gotta beat it into your head? Or maybe the script?"

"What does she mean by that?" Filia questioned.

"Nothing." The Player answered almost immediately. He ended up being charmed by Nadia's positive and upbeat attitude, he gives her a look of consent and nods. "You're right, we are. I'll see you around."

Excited at this acceptance Nadia was getting butterflies in her stomach and grins happily, she then turns her attention to Filia and Squigly. "And don't forget a friend of a friend is a friend so that includes you all."

"Of course!" Filia accepts without hesitation, she was always keen on meeting new people, especially when they were nice.

Squigly laughs at Filia's childlike innocence but accepts this as well. "Of course. The more the merrier."

"I like how none of this is directed toward me." Umbrella states in the background looking displeased, one could say she's being salty.

Nadia fist pumps the air victoriously. "Kick ass! You guys make getting allies really easy." She then held her fist to the Player and he meets her halfway. "I'll be seeing you guys, enjoy your time off."

And with that she leaves, jogging back to Little Innsmouth.

"What an eventual day this turned out to be, huh?" The Player asked the girls.

"Indeed. I've never had a snowball fight before. It was really fun!" The spirited singer expressed gleefulness at the new memories she's created.

"Never? Man. You must've been sheltered as a kid, huh?"

"Not sheltered, just busy with...stuff, I guess. Training my voice, performances, keeping up with traditions, among other things."

"Yeah, yeah. Just don't betray me like that again." He walks by her with a narrowed gaze.

"Betray? What do you mean?" She asked while following after him.

"You know what I'm talking about; you and Filia were BOTH against me back there."

"That's because YOU wanted to get back at us for the snowballs."

"That doesn't make it right, Sienna."
The two were going back and forth with this and Filia laughs at their exchanges. She taps Umbrella on the shoulder to get her attention, "C'mon, let's get after them." she says to the princess.

"Right." She happily nods and skips ahead of Filia who follows after her.

Oddly enough they didn't seem to realize they were forgetting something or rather someONE - that Egret who was on Umbrella's team. He was lying under a mountain of snow with his hand held up, index finger extended. "Hey...guys? That's fine and all but what happens to me? I'm kinda stuck... No, seriously! ...Anybody?"

Poor Egret. Chances were high he was going to have to dig his way out or wait for the snowplow crew to come along, but let's get back to more important matters.

"So are you guys going back home?" Umbrella asked.

"Mhm." Filia was the first to answer. "We have a few things to take care of. Plus we have to change out of these wet clothes. My legs are starting to freeze."

"Yeah. I figure we'd-" Before the Player could continue Squigly places one finger over his lips.


He nudged his head to the right a bit, looking confused before manually removing her finger from his mouth. "Why?" He asked looking lost.

"Because!" Filia exclaims in a mild panic "...Um." now that she had jumped to a shady conclusion Filia had the spotlight on her but since she didn't have an excuse she drew a blank, looking rather foolish in a poor attempt at covering up

She was choking and Squigly knew she had to act quickly before he caught on, suddenly an idea! "Because we're going to be changing and will be in the nude."

'Was that it?' He thought to himself. They were saying it like it was supposed to be a bad thing, or at least for him. "All the more reason to come home." He replies with a sly smirk and wiggly eyebrows at the two.

The two stare him down and point in the opposite direction. "Go do something else until we say it's ok to come home." They were both stern about this, no time for games.

"Geez... Fine, I will. I wasn't trying to come home anyway because I had something to do in town."

"Great! So it works out for everybody!" Filia cheered.

There was something going on and it was beyond obvious they were trying to hide something from him and since Christmas was tomorrow the Player was no fool regarding their plans but chose to play along. "Why are you two acting so funny?" He asked with his arms crossed.

"What do you mean?" Filia asked with both arms behind her back.

"What do you mean 'What do I mean'? You're both acting strange."

"No we're not." Squigly assured not so reassuringly. "Princess Parasoul wanted us to watch Princess Umbrella until she got back from her secret mission so we'll watch over Umbrella."

"Yeah, I know y'all will because I damn sure wasn't going to be looking after her."
"You're just butthurt that you got owned in the snowball fight." Umbrella sticks her tongue out to tease him.

He reaches his hands out to the young princess, appearing that he had the desire to wrap his hands around her throat but Filia steps in and pushes him along in the other direction. "So have a nice day out! Get all your things done and enjoy the town. We'll see you whenever, bye!"

"W-Whoa, easy..." He was pushed ahead to the curb. He looks back at the girls and watch as they wave frantically at him but no point in worrying about it now. They were being weird. "Ugh. Women." He sighs.

**New Meridian, Downtown**

**2:08pm**

The group had their plans so they made moves - the Player went off into town to handle whatever it was he had to do and the girls went back to the hotel to do whatever they had to do, it was a back and forth cycle right now but they went on their way. The Player was getting accustomed to the city life of New Meridian so all the landmarks were becoming more familiar to him so that he wouldn't need a map or have to ask for directions to get around, he finds himself in the heart of the city where the shops were still busy with last minute shoppers to get some of the best deals for their Christmas.

He had to make his way through crowds more than usual, it was like Black Friday outdoors. He took out a piece of paper and read over the notes he had written down. "Alright, so...I gotta get gifts for those two. Every store I been to this month has been out of practically everything. All the popular romance novels are out of stock but I think I can get Squigly those incense she wanted. I just have to find a store that sells them. Maybe I could kill two birds with one stone and find a Bed, Bath and Beyond or whatever this lands equivalent to that is, they should have both be there."

As he passed by a woman clad in a black trench coat, matching hat and shades seemed to recognize him at a glance. "Player?" Her voice was deep yet also familiar. "Hey, Player, is that you?" She spoke out to him again since she didn't seem to catch his attention earlier.

"Hm?" He hears her after the second attempt and looks back to see the woman approaching him. "Oh, I don't have any money. Sorry."

"What? No. It's me!"

"It's who?"

She lowers the shades from her eyes and slightly pulled the hat up to reveal those all too familiar beautiful amber eyes and scarlet hair. "Parasoul. You couldn't tell?"

"Parasou-?" She covers his mouth and held the other up to her own, with her index finger pointed out, shushing him. "Mmmm?" He furrowed a brow at her.

"I'm under disguise. I don't want anybody knowing its me because I seem to attract the attention of the masses and I can't really get anything done. You understand?"

He nods to show he understood and she removes her hand from over his mouth. "I mean...its not hard to see considering you're...well, y'know, a pretty big deal to the kingdom."

"Yes, I know."

"Right but what are you doing out here?"
"I've been working my brain trying to figure out what Umbrella would like for Christmas. I haven't
gotten the chance to pay it much mind so the holiday shopping was pretty last minute, I've been so
busy I lost track of time and now I'm stuck with nothing."

"Ooooh. Damn, that sucks."

"I've searched every store in Canopolis for the perfect gift but I end up always coming back to the
same thing, childish things that couldn't possibly interest her. I only know what she used to go for
during her younger years, but she's matured so much since then."

This was news to the Player, he reacts by giving her a moment to see if she had more to add or
readjust to her previous statement but nope. "You sure about that chief?"

"Of course." She was dead serious.

"Pfft. Riiight."

"Player, I'm serious."

"I know. I feel for you and you've got a problem but you're loaded with money, just buy her
whatever and she's bound to like something."

"I can't just buy any ol' thing because it'll look like I haven't even tried or don't even know anything
about her."

He could see where she was getting at and considering how childish Umbrella was he got the mental
image of her tossing away expensive items that would sure to wow any kid around her age, the rank
of princess brings to mind the whole 'spoiled' stereotype, that nothing would really be good enough.

"Yeah, that's a toughie. Heh. You're a really good sister though, going through all this trouble just to
find something to please her on Christmas morning."

She sighs and rubs the back of her neck. "I guess so. What about you? How come you're out here
during the day? I thought you would've been home with the others."

"Nah. We took Umbrella to the park for some playtime after you dropped her off in the morning, let
the little monster stretch her legs. We were out for a few hours and they decided to head back home.
I'm kind of in the same boat as you, I gotta find my friends some gifts."

"Yeah? Heh... It's good to know I'm not alone there."

He smirks at her and pats her back. "Of course you're not. Maybe we should look together and see
what we could find."

"Together?"

"Yeah. Two heads are better than one and I don't want you stressing over it."

His offer put a bit of calm on her mind, with Molly gone the task seemed to have gotten more tedious
and having to hide her appearance only added onto that. The Player hasn't let her down thus far so
why now? "Thank you." She expresses her gratitude with sincere words.

He bumps the left side of his chest with a fist and smiles. "Of course. It'll be fun with the two of us."

To Be Continued
"This isn't fun." The Player was sitting bored out of his mind in a clothing store while Parasoul was searching for through the pants rack.

It seems to be a running gag that Parasoul was stuck choosing between two objects, this time it was between shorts and jeans. "I can't seem to decide." She says to herself before facing the Player. "Which one do you would look better on Umbrella?"

"I don't know... Neither? I've never known her to wear pants so I can't say. Hm, now that I think about it I can't remember if she actually had pants when we were in the snow."

"UGH! This is a disaster..." Parasoul expressed a bit of frustration judging by her tone.

"I hear ya. I hope she doesn't have to get any of her legs amputated, it's cold out there."

"Not that. I meant this Christmas crisis." She hangs both trousers up on their respective racks. "My mind is just all over the place."

The Player stands up from the stool he was sitting on and approaches her. "I think you just need to chill out. You don't want to start losing your hair from the stress do you? We don't want you bald." He teased playfully.

"I won't go bald." She states but her hand found its way to her forehead, stroking her hair from underneath her hat as if she was worried even if she didn't realize. "What would you get a child around her age?"

"Not a damn thing." He states sternly with his arms crossed. Parasoul narrowed her eyes at him which made him feel the need to change his answer. "I mean...I don't know, maybe she'd like a video game?"

"A what?"

"A video game."

"I know what you said but...what is that? I've never heard of it."

The Player thought she was joking and laughs hysterically at her. As he laughs Parasoul stood maintaining the same expression of confusion, the surrounding customers were even acknowledging how loud he was being by offering similar stares but this was only because he was overreacting.

He sees that the princess wasn't joking now that he realized she hasn't changed in expression. "...Holy sh- Are you serious? Canopy doesn't have any video games?"

"I keep asking what that is but you're not telling me!"

"How can you not know what a video game is? What is this? The 1940's?! ...Actually, no that would make a lot of sense. What year is it, Parasoul?"

It was revealed that she was rubbing the bridge of her nose, trying to cope with the stress he didn't appear to be taking seriously which slightly annoyed her. "That doesn't matter." Her tone was monotone.

"Well excuse me, princess."
"I wish you'd take this seriously."

No matter what he did nothing seemed to get through to her, despite offering numerous suggestions. He exhales through his nostrils and puts on a more serious face. "Ok, ok. I doubt I'll be of any help here, Parasoul. I don't know the first thing about kids and their desires, especially when they're part of another culture that I'm just starting to adapt to. Not only that I wouldn't know what a young princess would want. I imagine she already has everything she needs."

"...You're beginning to sound like Molly." Parasoul directs her glare off to the side, not that the Player would've been able to see since she had on those shades.

"Well what does that tell you?"

"Hm?" She gives him a second glance.

"If I'm beginning to sound like another person who offered the same advice what does that mean? It means you shouuuuuuld- what?"

Parasoul looks at him in a complete loss, she wasn't sure how to answer this as she never had to worry about this problem before. Usually she just showered Umbrella in gifts but now that she was older she was unsure. The princess conjures up a 'What If' scenario in her mind.

"Merry Christmas, Umbrella!" She hands over a gift wrapped in a pretty green bow to match the season.

_Umbrella takes the box and unwarps it, removing the lid and looking at what was inside with a look of contempt. "What is this? More stuff that I only enjoyed as a kid?! You still think I'm a child?!"

Parasoul held up her hands with an obviously nervous smirk. "N-No! I just thought you were still a fan of these so I got the newest addition to the lineup."

"So you just ASSUMED I would be a kid forever?"

"What? Noooo! No, not at all!"

"Is it because I'm the LITTLE sister?! HUH?"

"N-No..." The red head's voice was reduced to a timidly high-pitch tone. She shaking like an intimidated puppy.

Parasoul was becoming smaller and smaller with each outburst while Umbrella was getting taller, it wouldn't be long until she was towering over the now chibi-esque Parasoul. The youngest sibling had her upper body cloaked in shadow, her eyes nothing more than two red circles to give off that menacing flare. Thunder and lightning even went off in the background to truly give off that dramatic effect. Nothing quite like overexaggerating to let you know you're the paranoid older sister.

Her little mini chapter poofs out of her head and she is seen standing there in a silent panic, shaking in place with her body was completely pale in comparison, literally, it was like she was void of color, humorously matching the 'Color Failure' trope.

The Player noticed she was being a bit too quiet and waved his hand in front of her face.

"Uh, hey, Parasoul?"

"...More!"
He sudden shout made him jump. "WHA! Jeez...you didn't have to just reanimate like that. You gave me a heart attack."

No time for that, she grabs his hand and marches onward with an even more determined look on her face. "That tells me I have to keep trying!"

Despite his best attempts at resisting the princess was easily able to drag him along like a pet on the leash. "Wait! No! I still have to do my own thing! Parasoul waaaaaaaait!"

Thankfully her disguise was viable, the customers got out of her way and watched in concern as the Player was dragged along, staring them down like they were some odd couple. It was going to be a long day if Parasoul was going to keep acting like this.

**Poorman's Hotel**

**2:00PM**

In the comfort of their home the girls were getting nice and cozy in a change of warm clothes, though Samson and Leviathan were still hidden away since Umbrella was still with them, Samson had his eyes and mouth closed so Filia just appeared as a normal girl, so there was no need to worry.

Squigly was wearing a long sleeved red sweater with a new pair of red and white tights, she most likely stocked up on the same outfit so she could always keep to her default attire without having to worry about keeping on dirty clothes.

Filia was wearing one of the Player's t-shirts and it was rather baggy for her, in length it reached down to her thighs and she kept the sleeves rolled up to her bicep, she wore black leggings underneath and white socks. Umbrella kept to her wool winter coat.

The trio's residence was all jazzed up for the holidays, decorations everywhere, complete with a beautiful pine tree and a little angel at the top. The trio really worked together to get things all Christmassy. Squigly was laying her gifts under the tree, one for Filia and the other for the Player, accompanying her gifts was one from Filia to her but she was lacking one for the Player.

"Looks like we're all set!" Squigly says with a delightful sigh. "I can't wait to see your faces tomorrow, Filia! I really hope you like my gift."

Filia, who was sitting on the couch with her legs tucked up, looks over to Squigly while simultaneously crafting something in her hand. "I know I will, Squigly. You know you really didn't have to get me anything."

"Oh no! I don't want to hear that, of course I had to. You and the Player have been so good to me so showing a little appreciation on Christmas is the least I can do."

"Speaking of which...you know chances are pretty high he's going to be mad when he finds out you've been working this entire time, right?" Filia asks with a smile.

As if she had to bring it up, Squigly just rolls her eye and shakes her head. "Trust me, I know. But I don't care. I want him to know how much you two mean to me. You're my best friends along with Leviathan."

"Who's Leviathan?" Umbrella asked after taking a drink from her mug, it was hot cup of tea made by Filia.

"A special friend." Squigly answered with the cutest possible smile she could give.
"Like a boyfriend?" Umbrella asked with a teasing glance.

Squigly held her hand up and waved dismissively. "Hehe. I said 'best friend' remember? Leviathan's a lot more like a guardian than a romantic interest."

"She's still young." Filia giggles after directing her comment to Squigly about Umbrella.

Umbrella nearly chokes on her tea thanks to Filia's comments and sat her cup down to confront this claim. "Hey! I'll have you know I'm practically an adult, I'm mature and everything. I just think having that special someone on Christmas would make it even better. I've been trying to convince Parasoul to make a move on Adam but all she cares about is work."

"Well...she is a princess." Filia mentions.

"That don't mean she can't get some on the side."

The older girls were shocked Umbrella would say such a thing, both stopping what they were doing to give her conflicting stares. "Umbrella..." Filia spoke up "Where did you learn that?"

Umbrella shrugs. "I heard it on TV somewhere. No idea what it means though."

"Swear to me you won't ever use that again!" Filia was beginning to act like an older sibling, even blushing that she would even throw out such a thing so casually.

"Is it bad?"

"N-Not necessarily but you're too young to be speaking like that."

"Hey! I said I'm practically an adult, remember?"

"Say it again and I'm telling Parasoul."

The young princess freezes up and lowers her head in defeat, an angry was a scary Parasoul so it was best for her to accept, "Fine." she hesitantly complies, now taking up her mug once again. "What about you, Filia? Got somebody special coming through?"

"Nope. Just me and my friends."

"Gosh. Is everybody single? If that's the case that has to mean the Player is single too. I wonder if Parasoul would consider taking him."

The thought caused a reaction from Filia, and only Filia it seems, as she visibly twitches.

Squigly was just wondering how the two of them could work, they were two complete opposites of one another. "Hmmm... That's an interesting combination." She comments. "You don't want to just throw men at your sister now."

"I'm not. Parasoul thinks highly of him." Another comment that seemed to make Filia twitch, this time more noticeable than last. "She calls him dependable, talks about how nice he is, wonders how he's making out, often thinks about inviting him over to the castle during special events."

"Does she?" This was all interesting to hear for Squigly, there was a minor glance of Filia breaking out into a frantic sweat to the singer's left but she hadn't noticed because her attention was on Umbrella, Filia tried to pretend as if she wasn't in the conversation. "If you put it that way then yeah, I can see it happening. It's not unusual for two opposites to attract one another."
"He may be a jerk but he'd make a cool brother in-law."

"NO!" Filia outbursts out of left field, Squigly and Umbrella flinch at this and Samson accidentally opens his eyes but closes them after to keep up appearances. "...I mean, heh, it's best to let it all happen naturally. You can't force that kind of thing." She forces a smile to cover up the fact that something was bothering her.

"Filia," Samson whispers sounding annoyed "What the hell was that about? You woke m-" his words were cut short as Filia threw her head back against the couch. "-Nnnngh!"

Despite that sudden yell Filia raised a point both girls could agree on. "Yeah, I guess." Umbrella concurs. "Besides, with how busy she's been with me I doubt she needs to worry about keeping him under her finger."

"Exactly." Filia nods over and over with a smug mug, hinting at a bit of self-accomplishment. "Besides, he's not ready for that kind of thing... For all the positives there are still some glaring issues he has to work out. Like, he doesn't get a girl's heart so it's best we give him time."

"Quite observant, aren't'cha?"

Squigly covers her mouth to hide her amused smile and closed her eye. "I was about to say the same thing."

"It's what friends do. We look out for each other." Filia had a bit of sass in her tone now that she had the feeling they were trying to insinuate something, unfortunately for her this didn't convince her friends, they only offered bigger smiles much to her dismay as she peaks over to them but keeps her head as if nothing was wrong.

"Heh. Don't worry, we're just messing with you." Squigly says. "But I'm curious, did you get him anything for the holiday? I see a gift for myself but not for him?"

"I'm working on it now." Filia answers, whatever she was doing with her hands was actually her creating the gift by hand.

"Oh? So that's what you were doing. What is it?"

"It's a charm." She held it up to show that it was only half complete – the shape resembled a heart with a skull at the center, there was even a little crown-like symbol etched above the skull, the charm itself was created with a beautiful stained glass design within a silver frame, the heart was red, the skull was white and everything else was silver. "It took me forever to figure out the design but I should have it done by tomorrow."

"It looks cute!" Squigly squeals with her hands clapped together.

"Laaaame..." Samson muffles from under the pressure Filia had him under since she was still laying back on him from earlier.

Filia ignores her parasite all together and gives Squigly a look of gratitude, the compliment made her a bit more confident in her gift which helped influence to work even harder on it.

Umbrella blows on her tea and takes another sip, now that it was cooler she was able to take longer gulps. She breaks away from the cup with a satisfied sigh. "If you're handmaking him a gift I think it's only fair he handmakes you something."

"What?" Filia asked with an expression that was obviously confusion. "He doesn't have to do that
for me." Filia laughs a bit at thought of the Player HAVING to buy something in order for Filia to feel as if they were even, that wasn't the point of the gift.

"I think he does. Matter of fact... What if he just comes back empty handed? Wouldn't you be disappointed?"

Filia shakes her head in disapproval. "Of course I wouldn't."

"Yeah, see? You'd be mad-." Just before she could get preachy Umbrella realized what Filia's answer was. "Wait, what? What do you mean you wouldn't? How could you wake up on Christmas morning and not be sad you don't have a pretty box waiting for you?"

Realizing the young princess was being serious Filia looks up at her with a casual firm look, a lecture was just on the horizon. "It's not about having a box waiting for you."

"Oh! Right!" Umbrella pops herself on the head now that she realized how her question must've sound to Filia. "Of course. It's not about the box, I'm so stupid. It's what's in the box that matters!"

Filia and Squigly sigh at her rambunctiousness. "No, Umbrella," Filia speaks again "It's not about pretty boxes or what's in them. What matters is what comes from the heart."

"The heart?"

Squigly nods in response. "The act of giving the gift comes from the heart. When we give we wish to make the people most precious to us happy, you understand?"

Sadly Umbrella wasn't too certain of this. She got the basic gist of what they were saying but the concept was still a bit fuzzy. "I...think? But, Filia, what if he DOESN'T get you anything?"

"He already has." She answered softly. Umbrella looks under the tree but didn't see anything from him, she looks back to Filia and notices that she was giving a tender look to her charm. "More than you know."

She still didn't understand and turns to Squigly in hopes of a clear answer. "Every day is a gift." The Contiello says to Umbrella with her eye closed, losing herself in the wonderful memories she's created with her friends. Squigly opens her eye and gives an assuring glance at the princess, "You'll understand someday." - she says with utmost confidence.

'What matters is what comes from the heart.' What could that possibly mean and why didn't she understand? Was it an age thing? She just couldn't figure it out and it began to make her wonder, a bit more than usual. He doesn't have to get her anything because he's already given so much. She thought it was a riddle and her brain was racing with thoughts while trying to figure it out until a thought of Parasoul crossed her, creating this special warmth inside her stomach, she couldn't explain it but whatever it was it caused her to think deeply of her sister and how happy she made her.

So while the girls were sharing this moment with Umbrella the Player was busy keeping up with another princess and what a task this was turning out to be on Christmas eve. Parasoul dragged him along from shop to shop in search of the perfect gift for Umbrella...which was still a negative on progress, no matter what the Player offered as a suggestion it just wasn't good enough.

Their search has led to the Meridian Mall and was the final location for their journey and there was STILL nothing good enough for Umbrella, the older sister was starting to feel the pressure. Despite it still being early in the day, or at least in the Player's eyes, shops were beginning to close, it was Christmas Eve after all so the duo were losing options. Luckily the Player was there to keep Parasoul calm.
"WHAT AM I GONNA DO...?" A not so calm Parasoul asked herself with her hands holding her head, glasses slanted while her nose and her right leg shaking anxiously. She was sitting by the mall's water fountain and passerby's acknowledged her behavior by being sure to keep their distance.

Paranoid Parasoul caught the attention of one little girl walking with her mother. "Mommy, that lady is talking to herself." She says with an adorable grin and a pointed finger.

"That's why we stay away from funny looking pills, dear." The mom responds with a warm smile.

Parasoul overhead the comment and it was enough to get her back on the surface of sanity, if only for an instant, her eyes were blank and her mouth was triangular in shape, this suppression of anger soon turned into a more intense look as she grits her newly formed sharp teeth, some real anime-esque expression here.

"You wouldn't be so cheery if you didn't know what to get your sister for the holiday!" She exclaims through her teeth in a muffled voice, preventing her from making an outburst.

The Player just got done in the Heavenly Nights merchandise store, Canopy's own variant of Beds, Bath and Beyond, he had a plastic bag full of goods. "Sweet, I think this'll all suffice for Sienna." He said to himself after checking his receipt, he makes his way to the fountain where a less than pleased Parasoul sat with her foot tapping.

"Aaaaah, well I hope you had a good time. Because I'm going out of my mind with worry here." The princess ironically spoke with a twistedly curled smile.

Seeing her like this nearly caused the Player to choke under the pressure of tamed laughter but he just gives her a casual look. "Well, they had some really sweet deals in there so yeah."

She gets up, grabs him by the shoulders and shakes him desperately. "I. Need. Heeeeeeelp!" She was on the verge of whining, was this the same Parasoul? The Player grabs her by the wrists and lowers her hands.

"Augh, c'mon. Get yourself together, princess."

"I don't want you calling me that." She gives him a look of discontent.

"My bad. Well, let's really sit back and think on it. What do yo usually get Umbrella for Christmas?"

Parasoul thought back on it and already had a handful of responses ready, "Clothes, shoes, toys, board games, a train set, a pirate ship," now the first few were normal but around the train set mark the Player's face had took a dramatic turn in shock "Her own home theater room, a castle, trips around the world and uuuuuh, oh yeah! Some-"

"Stop!"

"Huh?"

"You get her A LOT of stuff and that's good enough for me. Sheesh. Her own train set? Well I think they have some toys around here that still sell something like that."

"Toy? Oh, no, no. I mean her own train. You know, like the ones you see in the amusement park where the little kids can ride around with their parents?"

He slowly turns his head to the redhead and was left speechless, jaw slightly dropped and all. "...How much freaking room do you guys have in that castle?!"
"A lot." She answers innocently. "Maybe I can buy her a petting zoo?"

"No." Based on the delivery of that reply, and the emotionally void facial expression, he wasn't surprised anymore. "No, we're not doing that. Think small."

"Small? But that's exactly what I'm trying to avoid. Big girls deserve big things!"

"That's why you're killing yourself with worry, you won't allow yourself to see the bigger picture."

This struck Parasoul as a curious statement. "Bigger picture?" She questioned with a little lost look.

"How are you an adult and don't know this? Ok, look...we checked, what? Almost every store in the city? And you already searched all of Canopolis. There's not much else you can do. Think small."

"...Think small." She repeats to herself in a gentle voice.

**Later...**

"Hi, do you sell petting zoos here?" Parasoul asked the owner of a toy shop not far from the mall.

"Well, we do have a collection of stuffed animals that come with a special barn and pin."

"No, no. I mean a literal petting zoo."

It was here that the owner was beginning to wonder if this woman was crazy. Outside the store the Player was sitting in the snow with his back against the wall. "...This woman is going to be the death of me." He goes on to sigh heavily before leaning his head back. "I didn't even get a chance to buy Filia anything."

Time stood still for no one and all the running around he did with Parasoul lead to him being one gift short. The Player closed his eyes and lost himself in thought, sitting in silence and enjoying the only calm he's had all day. Suddenly he felt a cold embrace befall his nose, he opens his eyes to the sight of gentle snowfall descending from the grey clouds.

His gaze directed toward the sky for a good while until a minor yelp hit his ears, bringing him back to the area around him. He looks to his left and there stood a lonely cardboard box, the front and two sides read 'Please Adopt' and, from within, another yelp sounds off. The Player hesitantly reaches his hand out and opens the box to find a small puppy, specifically a yellow Labrador Retriever. Upon laying his eyes on the puppy his eyes widened slightly but maintained a neutral expression, but seeing him back the lab appeared to have a smile, the excited tail was further proof of its joy.

"...How you doin', little guy? Spending Christmas eve alone?" The lab barks at his words, 'communicating' with him. "Hm. I spent mine with a crazy lady. Been running around all day." The only thing the Player got was more barking.

Figuring the dog was hungry he reaches into the bag he got from Heavenly Nights and took out a sandwich which had some form of meat in it, he peels the plastic off and breaks it in half, the puppy tilted its head at the noise curiously and sees the Player lowering half into the box while keeping the other to himself.

"Shouldn't be hungry on a day like this." He finally shows the Lab a smile and bites into his sandwich and since it was only a half it only took two bites to fill his mouth, for the Labrador it basically had dinner for tonight. Once he was done the Player wipes his hands of the crumbs and stands. "Well, see ya."
Now taking a step inside the store he finds Parasoul still negotiating with the owner. He was protecting a Staff Only door from the disguised princess.

"M-Ma'am, you can't go in there!"

"Why not? If you really didn't have any animals back there you wouldn't have a problem with me going in there!"

"It's STAFF only!"

"More like 'Petting Zoo' only!" She held her hands up with the intent on fighting her way through but the Player rushes in and grabs ahold of Parasoul.

"WHOA! Parasoul! What the heck are you doing?!"

"Let go of me, Player! He has a petting zoo in there!"

"What?!" The Player faces the owner who just looks back at him in a haze of hostile confusion.

"I don't know what she's talking about! She thinks I have living animals in here!"

"YOU DO!" She protests fighting against the Player's grasp.

The Player summons all the strength he had to pull her away and, after a brief struggle, manages to do so, getting some distance between her and the store owner. "Geez. Are you done?" He asked the princess now having to play peacemaker.

"Yeah. Yeah, I'm done." She answers him calmly.

"You sure?"

"Yep. Uh huh. I'll just-...." Parasoul turns the other way as if she was ready to walk away but she pulls a quick 180 and makes a rush for the owner, luckily the Player was able to grab her, now being forced to push back against her, the owner even flinches at her sudden attempt to strike "SHOW ME WHAT'S BEHIND THAT DAMN DOOR!" she continued to fight.

"Put that woman on a leash!" The older male shouts in fear.

"I'm sorry!" The Player apologized while desperately trying to restrain her.

He did his best to drag her out, it was like a child trying to tame an adult pitbull, but eventually he gets her outside after she tosses a few stuffed animals along the way. Now that Parasoul was outside the Player shut the door behind her and stayed inside, picking up the toys she threw and putting them back in their rightful bins.

Once that was done he approaches the owner. "I am so sorry for that. She...literally never acts like that."

"It's...its ok. I imagine she's quite the hassle."

"She's fine. I think it's the holiday stress. She can't find a gift for her sister and now she's losing her mind since all the stores are closing early. You're our last stop."

That fiasco was for her sister not having a gift? The owner had trouble believing that but there didn't seem to be a lie in the Player's tone so he gives him benefit of the doubt. "Her sister?" He asks.
"Yeah. She has to be the mother and big sister of the house. It's not easy on her, especially since she's so young. This is the first Christmas where she's been stumped." The Player chuckles a bit at how the princess could get when it came to her sister, especially when she's always seen as the coolest lady around. "She feels her sister is getting older and since she's always spoiling her like a child she wasn't prepared for older Christmases. I wouldn't be surprised if she ended up using the Skull Heart to wish for the 'Perfect Gift', y'know?"

Hearing his story the owner was beginning to see their situation in a new light, he looks out the front window only to see Parasoul cracking her knuckles with a pretty expressive frown, seeing this made the man shiver but he still sympathized. "I don't have much, I'm sorry. I doubt she'll find what she's looking for here...but if I may suggest a small gift?"

"Sure." The Player nods.

The owner guides him to the counter and directs the Player's attention to the display cabinet, there were many beautiful accessories spread throughout, amazing quality. "She can have one of these."

The Player looks among the selection, there were plenty to admire. "Oh these are pretty cool. How much?"

"Her choice is on the house. I figure why not? It's the holidays and she's in need."

"Really? Oh wow. She'd really appreciate that." The Player looks to the window and sees Parasoul peeking in with a menacing glare. "...On second thought it's probably best I pick for her."

"Y-Yeah. I think so too." He agrees nervously.

The Player takes another gander at the selection and found appeal in two white turtle doves. "I think those two will do." He points.

"Aaah, excellent choice." He unlocks the cabinet with a key and takes out the two doves, giving them to the Player. "Here you are."

"Thank you, this should do nicely." After taking another look in the case his eye actually came across one more item from within. He squints his eye to really get a good look through the glass and after a second glance he knew he had to have it so he smiles. "Oh, and, uh, can I get that one?" He asks while pointing.

The owner looks into the case to see where the Player was pointing and nods. "Of course." He reaches back in and takes out the requested accessory. "It's a special case. You plan on giving it to someone special?"

"A friend of mine." The Player answers with his wallet in hand. "Two bones for this, right?" The owner nods and the Player exchanges the cash, paying the exact amount. Whatever the accessory was is unknown but after getting them bagged he heads for the door. "Thanks again, I really appreciate it."

"No problem, kid. Merry Christmas."

"And happy holidays to ya." He wishes him the best in return and departs.

"...Wait. Did he call that woman Parasoul?"

**Meanwhile, outside the store**
The Player checked the bag he was given while Parasoul slowly appears from behind him, her face rising from beyond his shoulder, chibi-faced and glaring. "Took you long enough."

"GAH!" He jumps after not even realizing she was so close. "What are you a ghost?"

"No. I'm frustra-!" Before she could even finish her sentence the Player hands her one of the bags from the store. ":- What's this?"

"Just take it. I got Umbrella a gift for you. The owner said it was on the house."

Hearing this was a surprise, she finally had a gift. She takes the bag and takes a peek inside. "What is this?"

"Two turtle doves. One for you and one for Umbrella. They're meant to symbolize a special bond between two people so you give one to a person you love and they say, with it, you'll share an eternal bond of happiness. Forever sisters, yay."

"...Oh." She expressed a bit of genuine surprise. Such a basic gift yet equally satisfying. She looks to the Player one last time, "You really think she'll like this?" there was a bit of doubt in her voice.

"It's coming from the heart. That's all that matters."

His answer was actually the thing that reminds Parasoul what the whole reason behind gift giving was. After all that running around, stressing about how big the gift needed to be she forgot the spirit of the endeavor, sure she could've gotten her the most expensive and biggest gift of all time but where would the heart and soul be if that's all it was?

Now that she had given it some thought she gives a tender smile and holds the gift close to her chest. "You're right." She replies happily, "I'm sure she'll love this... I'm sorry."

"Hm?"

"For all the stressing and complaining I've done. In the middle of my frenzy I just lost sight of what was really important. I'm sure I only ended up making a fool of myself."

"Yes! My word, yes. You have." He didn't waste time in giving her blunt honesty. Parasoul grunts mildly but accepts what was given by having a laugh. Seeing her in good spirits made the Player smirk, he begins to walk ahead. "C'mon, princess. Let's get going." Just moments after saying this a gentle pop befell his head. "Uh?" He looks back to the right and sees none other than Parasoul.

"I told you not to call me that."

"Riiight." He rubs the back of his head but then it just hit him, he remembered something and stops in his tracks.

Realizing that he stopped the princess turns around. "Something the matter?"

He didn't answer her with words, rather he just looks back over his shoulder in the direction of the shop and there the lone box stood.

Poorman's Hotel
12:00am, December 25th

Even after all those hours Filia, Squigly and Umbrella remained as the only ones home. Squigly was sleeping in the bed upstairs while Filia remained downstairs with Umbrella, letting the young
princess rest her head in her lap while she slept. Filia gently strokes her hair while looking out to the window where a full moon was put on a beautiful display.

Filia was just a little worried but couldn't let any negative thoughts take away her joy. Whenever she had these moments, especially when worrying over the Player's safety since he wasn't a fighter, he always seemed to prove her wrong and end up being just fine, so why should now be any different?

So, with a smile, Filia closes her eyes and lays her head back. "Merry Christmas." She wishes to her absent friends before finally allowing herself to sleep.

In a familiar yet also hazy area Umbrella stood among piles of gifts and yet her attention was never given to the material things, she was looking for something else but no matter where she empty all that awaited her were boxes. She was home, back at the castle and just lost in material things. Whatever it was that she was searching for it wasn't in any box. She spent Christmas eve without family for the first time, leaving her with a particular sense of emptiness.

With no other option she begins to search the boxes but as it turns out what awaited her was nothing. She tosses box upon box however, just like before, what she was looking for wasn't in any of them. She searched for what felt like years before she was down to nothing but she remembered that phrase Filia gave her - "What matters is what comes from the heart."

"...The heart." Umbrella said to herself.

She closes her eyes to look deep inside herself and waiting for her was the mental image of her big sister. Once she opens her eyes what appeared to be a physical manifestation of Parasoul appeared before her with a loving smile. It had just occurred to Umbrella that this was what she was searching. Her faces lights up with joy and just as she reaches out she was overcome with light.

The fade was replaced with a dark ceiling and her hand reaching out to it before a soft "...Parasoul." leaves her mouth. She awakens to find herself sleeping on Filia's lap, who was currently fast asleep. She looks over to the clock and sees the time, 4:30am. That dream she had had woken her up in more ways than one, the only thing she could think about was sharing the day with her sister but seeing as how she was still gone all she could do was lay there, cradling herself in the warmth of Filia's lap.

The following morning
9:00am

Squigly lays in bed asleep but as the morning glow shines on her face she was finally disturbed and begins to awaken. "Mm... Mmmm?"

"Good morning, Leviathan." Squigly says softly with her eye still closed.

"Good morning, mi'lady. Merry Christmas."

"Mmmm and a Merry Christmas to you too, Lev." Now that she got that out of her...head? Squigly quickly rises up. "Ohmygoodness! It's Christmas!" She jumps out of bed and runs toward the bathroom to get ready, getting herself clean and presentable much to Leviathan's shock, he could barely keep up with how fast she was moving. Squigly was like a child on Christmas day, she ran down the stairs and goes to the living room where Filia and Umbrella were still sleeping. "Guys! Guys, wake up! It's Christmas!"

"Noooo, I want to eat more..." Filia groans out in her sleep.
"What? No! Filia, Umbrella? Wake up!" Squigly gently slaps both their cheeks to get them up. The duo hesitantly come around but awaken to Squigly's cute face. "Merry Christmas!"

Umbrella blinks her eyes one at a time before wiping the sleep out of her eyes. "Merry Christmas, Squigly... Wait... Christmas?" She sees the sun up and jumps up "IT'S CHRISTMAS!"

"So it is." Filia says with a face that said 'still sleepy...'

"Did Parasoul ever get back?" Umbrella asked.

"I'm sorry, Umbrella. I'm afraid she hasn't." Squigly breaks the bad news to the girl.

But not five seconds later the front door opens, catching everyone's attention, entering the front room were none other than the Player and Parasoul. "Morning, guys." The Player waves with one hand and holding a decorated box in the other.

Hearing his voice that sleepy Filia was showing instantly went away and she gets up. "There you are!" She stomps over to him and got close with a pointed finger. "Do you know how worried we've been?!" Her close up made him back his head ever so slightly.

Squigly pops her head in. "She was the only one worried sick. I knew you were alright." She carries on to mind her own business.

"Anyway..." Filia tried ignoring her but couldn't, still, she just gave the Player that glare "You need to let us know when you're not going to be back for hours on end! What if something happened?"

"Correct me if I'm wrong, Filia, but didn't you tell me not to come back until you said it was ok to come back?" He asked with the biggest smile he's ever conceived, finally getting Filia in an argument she couldn't argue against.

It took her a minute to think back on it but once she remembered a heavy blush was plastered across her face. She turns around with her arms crossed to cover this up, not liking to admit defeat after she's been so overly protective. "Just come to the front room..." She guides them in.

They were all gathered together and just as Umbrella turns around she was greeted to an unfamiliar woman. "Merry Christmas, everyone." She says but that voice was all too familiar. Umbrella's eyes widen and she slowly gets off the couch, staring hopefully at the woman who just looks back at her.

"...That voice. Are...you?"

To answer her question she removes her shades, hat and scarf, unveiling herself as being Parasoul, of course. "Merry Christmas, Umbrella."

Seeing that was indeed the truth Umbrella took a single step back but as it was beginning to sink in she took a step forward which then turned into a sprint, she jumps out and glomps her sister. "Parasoul!" The amount of joy in her voice was what lit up the room.

Having her embrace overwhelm her Parasoul could only stand in place, briefly motionless, but as she realized her emotions were getting the better of her she crouches down to one knee and embraces her sibling. "I'm sorry I left you for so long."

"No! It doesn't matter..." She says drying her eyes in the wool of her coat, "You're here now... You're here now."

Squigly, Filia and the Player stand side by side, watching as the Renoir sisters share this moment
together. The trio look off to one another, realizing they were all expressing the same amount of joy and laugh to each other.

Umbrella got her eyes together and gives Parasoul a bright and flashy grin. "Merry Christmas, sis." While on that Parasoul hands over the bag. "...Huh? What's this?"

"Your gift."

"You got this for me?"

"Of course." She answers with her eyes closed and a smile.

Umbrella opens the bag and looks inside, she sees the gifts at the bottom and takes them out – it was the two turtle dove accessories. "What's this?"

"They're turtle doves. They represent a special bond between two people, love and friendship. You give one to someone you care for very much and...as long as you keep it you'll always be together. I'm not usually good at this but...you're my sister, my best friend, my world, my everything. I'd like for you to have them."

Just as she had gotten her eyes dry they were filled with water again, Umbrella began to cry at the heartfelt explanation but she had a small portion of it wrong, one of the doves was for Parasoul herself but just as the Player was ready to explain Umbrella took one and hands it over.

"And you're my everything too!" She exclaims in tears, gifting her the second one.

Parasoul took the token of love but wasn't sure how to react. She looks to the Player who nods at her. Understanding the bigger picture she clutches the dove tightly and the two sisters embrace once more. Despite it being small this was, by far, THE most emotional gift Umbrella had ever received. Having her sister was enough but this was something she just couldn't handle.

"Well, guys" The Player began to speak to his two partners "since it's Christmas we might as well get to our gifts too, right?" he laid the box down and hands over the Heavenly Nights bag to Squigly. "For you."

"Aaaaaw. You shouldn't have." Squigly affectionately states after taking the bag.

Now that she got to opening it she sees a collection of incense, bathetherapy salts, oils and an entire collection of pleasant aromatherapy goods she's been eying but couldn't afford. Saving up has really paid off for the Player.

"YOU DIDN'T!" Seeing this made Squigly freakout, she could feel her knees growing weak. The Player was proud knowing exactly what she wanted but he didn't show it, keeping cool by playing like it was nothing. "I did. I was able to snag the last limited bundle. Officially sold out." He says calmly.

"YOU DIDN'T! YOU DIDN'T!" She felt like a schoolgirl jumping for such joy. Squigly couldn't contain herself and jumps out at him, giving her comrade a tight hug while chanting "Thank you!" over and over. "Your gift is under the tree! I'm gonna... Nnnneeeeeeehehehehehehe!" She squeals uncontrollably and runs upstairs. The sound of bath water running was all that was heard.

Even Filia couldn't believe Squigly was being so excited and watched her off with an amusingly surprised look. "Wow. That was something."
"Indeed it was. I've never seen her like that. Heh, women. Amiright?"

She rolls her eyes and shakes her head with that 'Oh, Player' smirk. "I resemble that." She states with her hands on her hips. "Let me get your gift." She goes to the tree and gets her cute decorative bag. "Here, I made this for you."

"Made?" He questions.

"Mhm. I hope you like it."

"...Huh. Well, here." He gently slides the red and green box he was carrying over to her feet using his own, a gentle yelp comes from the box which caught Filia's attention. "This one's for you."

What was that sound and why did it make her heart race? She crouches down and placed her hands on the boxes top, she unwrapped the pretty bow, moves the box top and once she sees what was waiting for her she could swear her heart skipped a beat, it was a yellow Labrador Retriever with a collar on.

"Filia, Butterscotch. Butterscotch, Filia." The Player introduced them to each other.

This puppy was indeed the same puppy the Player came across in front of the toy store, it turns out he had went back and did the necessary to ensure he could keep the little pup who was already up for adoption in that cardboard box. That would explain why it took him until morning to get back to the hotel, or at least wait until morning with Parasoul, chances were high he stayed at the Renoir castle overnight.

Filia was left in complete and utter shock, she loved dogs, especially small ones like this. She had one hand held over her mouth and her eyes were shimmering in disbelief.

"I figure since I'm already good at picking up strays one more couldn't hurt." He was of course making a joke about having Filia and Squigly living with him. "I originally wanted to let you name him but I needed to come up with a name on the spot so I just went with Butterscotch. Get it? Cause he's a yellow Lab? Or is butterscotch candy orange? ...I dunno."

The teen's eyes never left the pup's face but after receiving a few excited barks she finally reacts. She removes her hand from her mouth, revealing that her lips were tucked in. She reaches into the box and picks up the new addition to their group. She brought the dog close and held him, her bangs covering her eyes.

"What is it that you want from me?" This question was for the Player.

"Whatcha mean?" He asks curiously.

Filia raises her head to reveal her overjoyed face, just a mere look into her swollen eyes and one could see how grateful she was to him. "I'll give you any and everything. Whatever you want, I'll give. Just name it." She speaks with a near broken voice in a somewhat sad attempt at speaking, her smile cracking whilst trying to maintain it.

She stands and takes baby steps in his direction, not stopping until she was directly in front of him, now laying her head into his chest, she was unable to provide a hug given that Butterscotch was in her arms.

The Player looks down to Filia but wasn't quite sure how he was supposed to react. He's never seen Filia so emotionally vulnerable so what could he do? Well, choosing not to be stupid, he goes for the obvious, returning the joy by wrapping his arms around her for the both of them. In the middle of this
he reaches into his bag and takes out the charm she made, it was brilliantly crafted, the stained glass
design reflects light beautifully, he held the charm by the long silver chain that was attached to the
top.

This craftsmanship was excellent and must've took a long time to make, the Player was in awe. He
clutches the charm in his hand and goes back to hugging Filia with Butterscotch between them.

"That's a bit much, isn't it?" He asks.

"Just name it."

"...Hmm. You don't have to go that far. This is enough." He finally answers with one hand stroking
the back of her head for comfort.

Out of everything in the world just having her was all he wanted, or at least that's how Filia
interpreted it, thus causing her body to heat up, she couldn't comprehend the emotions swirling inside
her heart but all she knew was that she was grateful to have such a loving friend. She completely
buries her face in his chest, hiding her embarrassment, which prompts the Player to keep supporting
her until she was better.

Throughout the morning Filia and Umbrella played with Butterscotch while the Player and Parasoul
watch, engaging in casual conversation and the like, Squigly was keeping the bathroom on
lockdown, she had incents lit and an entire hot bath filled with bubbles that covered her body, even
Leviathan was showing signs of being pleased, they soaked for hours and felt serene, there was
nothing quite like it.

Grand Cathedral Ruins
10:23am

Marie sat in a meditating position on her bed, she made a full recovery and was back to 100%. She
senses a familiar presence at the door to her secret chambers and opens her eyes before a knock even
came to the door.

Knock, knock

"You don't have to knock." She says with the echo in her voice.

The door opens and the Player steps in. "Morning, Marie."

"...What're you doing here?"

She was still pretty bad at greeting him it seemed, same ol' Marie never ceased to earn a smile from
him since he got to know her. "Now is that the best way to greet a guest? Manners, Marie. Manners." He says with a laugh.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to sound cold...I just wasn't expecting company."

Considering how he just visits without warning most of the time he figured she'd be used to it by
now or at least come to expect him at any given time but that didn't distract the Player from more
important matters.

"Merry Christmas and happy holidays. Well, if you're into that kind of thing."

"Christmas? Huh... I didn't even realize what today was. You came all the way here just for that?"
"It's important to me so I wouldn't write it off as 'just for that', Marie. I gotcha something." He digs into his coat pocket and approaches the bed.

In one hand he held hers out and with the other he lays down a silver accessory, written on it was the word 'Always'. Marie looks down to it, confused but intrigued as she didn't understand what it was and looks at him. "What is this?"

"Hold on." He goes into his other pocket and takes out a similar item, on it reads 'Friends', he combines their two pieces together and once formed they read 'Always Friends'. "See? It's a present. I got it from a small shop at the last minute. It's not much but it means a lot. As long as you carry it just know I have the other half and once we're together we make it whole. Its cheesy but it gets the point across."

His smile and thought touches the heart she thought she lost to darkness. There was a moment of silence between them, the Skullgirl going from looking at him to their combined accessories and then back at him. "...You...never cease to surprise me." She ends up smiling while keeping her accessory close to her heart.

Without warning Marie was brought into a hug, much to her shock, the Player held her even closer. It didn't matter what she was or how the world viewed her, he knew who she was and provided her love and care, truly showing that she mattered and wasn't alone.

Marie remained still and could swear she hasn't blinked since this sign of affection began but her eyes were still plenty moist. She loses herself in the moment but finds that her arms were hesitating to wrap around him. She drops her arms but smiles into his hold.

"You're still too nice." She says calmly.

"I know but that's what you like about me." He playfully teases her with a joke.

A response she had no come back to. Marie lefts out a soft chuckle but provides no words, however she didn't need to say anything for him to know she was grateful. After his visit to Marie's the Player was heading back home, traversing the snowy roads with his hands tucked away in his coat pockets.

"Well, I think I handled everything. Once it's all over it's back to work and the daily grind. And now we have a dog so I'll have to get pads, food, treats, toys... Why do I do this to myself?"

"Oh, hey! There he is neow!"

That cat pun...there was only one person that could've come from, the Player looks across the street and sees none other than Nadia, along with Cerebella and Feng. The three girls caught their light and walk across the intersection.

"Morning, guys." He greets them casually.

"Morning." Nadia returns the greeting. "Where you off to?"

"I was just on my way back home. Dropped a gift off at a friend's house."

Cerebella crossed her arms while holding a snarky grin at him. "What a coincidence, we were just on our way to see you."

"You were? That's nice of you three. Coming to wish me and the girls a happy holiday?"

"No." Feng answered plainly. "We were promised Christmas treats."
...That's right, the other day he did indeed promise his friends their reward for helping him in that snow brawl but now that the day was upon them he realized it was time to pay up and he had nothing to show for it.

"Oh...right. That."

His reaction wasn't convincing so Feng squints her eyes at him and took a step forward, almost getting nose to nose with him. "You DO have those delicious homemade treats. Don't you? And some eggnog to help get it down?"

"Uuuuh..." For some reason his heart rate was beginning to increase.

"He better because I got sent into orbit for him." Not literally but Cerebella joins in on the hostility since Umbrella did indeed sent her flying.

Feng took another step forward. "Let's not forget being sent flying into a dumpster by a child."

There was a fierce aura to the trio, well, not much for Nadia because she was just looking for a fun time, but nevertheless the circus performers were awaiting compensation for their efforts.

Though initially intimidated the Player wasn't going to stand for it. His look of worry turns to a firm stare down before he manually pushes the two back to give him breathing room.

"Guys, enough! It's Christmas! You're supposed to be here for good will and sharing time with friends. You weren't supposed to come out here in search of a reward. No, that's wrong. You were supposed to come out and wish me, Filia and Sienna a Merry Christmas! Maybe with some gifts in hand, I wouldn't mind, but as long as you had- Wait, what are you guys doing?"

His little speech was cut short as the three were shown holding snowballs. They just gave him that charismatic half-glided gaze, deciding to let him finish his speech before leading to their impending snow assault.

"Ya done?" Feng asked sarcastically.

"Heh...uh, guys, let's just take it easy now..." He was beginning to take a few steps back.

Cerebella juggled her snowball in one hand while taking each step toward him. "No cookies makes Cerebella a dull girl."

"N-Nadia, talk some sense into them, would ya?"

She was just as excited as they were and had an arm full of snowballs. "Oh no. I'm on their side, but only because I want to have another round of snowball fighting."

"Ladies, please..."

"Merry Christmas." The three said to him before winding up and preparing to destroy him with a triple throw.

A/N: Real quick: Squigly did have gifts for Filia and the Player, they just weren't open 'on screen' so if you're curious to know I'll tell you what they all got;

Filia got a complete boxset collection of this romance novel series she really loves so she'll have a ton to read in her spare time and the Player has gotten winter clothes: a hat, scarf and
gloves. I originally had a scene where the group took a collection of pictures which shows the 
gifts that were given, Squigly being able to buy as much as she did lead to her picture being a 
scolding session, because her having a job means being among the people, but while he 
jabbers on and on she just sat there like "Sure, whatever, dad..." in the most bored way 
possible.

Originally Filia got Squigly a body pillow of her idol, Eliza, but this was scrapped because I 
didn't think it fit Squigly's character to have something like that, so instead Filia had got her a 
few records of some of the best singers in the Canopy Kingdom, opera singers and jazzy tunes. 
Honestly I wasn't sure what would make a good gift to an opera singer so I just put in the 
obvious, more music related material, I suppose that would be something they'd like. I was 
honestly stuck on trying to solve this for a good while "...What would an opera singer like as a 
gift?" and bleh, I shouldn't have been stuck like that lol. Oh btw, if you didn't know, Filia's 
charm is the Skullgirls logo made from stained glass.

If there is one thing I'm uncertain about with this is how emotional I made Filia with her gift. I 
wasn't sure if that was the proper emotion to display but at the same time it felt necessary. 
According to Alex Ahad Filia is smitten with cute dogs, small ones, in fact there is speculation 
that Samson was attached to a dog before coming in contact with Filia so getting her a dog as 
a gift could've pushed her to some deep emotion, especially after the Player was gone all night 
which prompted her to worry.

I also had fun teasing PlayerxFilia ship for those who actually support those two. I guess I 
should bring up that there are a few who ship PlayerxSquigly, I've even gotten a request to 
give him something with zombie waifu, but having multiple ships is still a no-no for me. It's 
only a tease anyway, so take it with a grain of salt.

So ends another chapter, happy to get it out. It was fun making Parasoul crazy, this is 
probably the closest I'll get to making Salty Parasoul a thing since she's much more crazy 
under that persona, I still love how well Erin Fitzgerald did her voice, it was so perfect, 
especially that deranged laugh she does. If you don't know what I'm talking about: Salty 
Parasoul. As always thanks for reading, dropping a favorite, reviewing, following, whatever, 
everything you do just big thanks from me!
Omake: Another One?

Alright, so the Player, Cerebella, Squigly, Parasoul, Ms. Fortune and Painwheel arrived at their restaurant of choice and they sat together in a decently sized booth. Remember the last omake when they went to eat? Yeah, this is now. The Player, Squigly and Parasoul sat on one side of the table while Cerebella, Nadia and Painwheel were on the other.

"Ok, let's go over this one more time." Squigly says with a piece of loose leaf paper in hand.

Hearing this made the Player groan heavily. "Oh, come oooooon. We've been through this like ten times." He was sandwiched between Parasoul and Squigly to ensure he wouldn't run out on their meeting.

"And we're not stopping until everything is made clear!" Painwheel's raspy voice silenced him in an instant, she clearly wasn't in the mood to hear anything other than business from him.

Rather than argue with Painwheel, who seemed the most willing to beat him up, the Player chooses to direct his complaints elsewhere, he looks down to see Squigly's hip touching his and found his scapegoat.

"Move over a bit, Squigly. It's cramped in here."

She looks down between them and realized how petty he was being. She gives him a squinted glance of disapproval. "You have plenty of room. Stop complaining."

He swayed his hips back and forth between the two girls as if trying to get comfortable. "Uuugh. You don't even need to eat anything else, not with that big ol' butt taking up most of the seating."

"What?!" Squigly nearly lost her cool but then calmed herself with a collected smile. "Oh no, you're not slick."

"What?"

"You're trying to distract us from going over the list but it won't work and you're not weaseling your way out of this."

Squigly was clever as always and caught him. Now that his plan was foiled the Player picks up the restaurant menu and sulkingly reads over the choices with nothing smart to say.

With the problem silenced Squigly looks back to the note. "Alright, so! One more time. We've got: Equal share with Heart-Syncing. More active roles in the coming chapters-

Painwheel slams her fist on the table, causing most of the group to jump. "Carol gets a chapter!"

"Y-Yes, I was getting to that." Squigly clarifies.

"Ok. Carry on." Painwheel smiles adorably behind that face mask, it was made clear as the mouth piece curled into a smile.

Squigly shakes her head at the impatience but gets back on focus. "Carol gets a chapter… More character development for those with less screentime. More cat puns."

"More?" The Player questioned.
Cue Nadia. "Yes!" The feline held up her hand with pride to show that it was her idea to contribute.

"Why would we need more of those?"

"It just feels like I'm not making enough. Cat puns are PURfect for my character. Surely it'll get a laugh out of my fans."

That was a serious suggestion and the Player couldn't believe it, he sighs rebelliously but knew the girls were in power here so he had to be reasonable. "I don't think that's a valid idea." He states.

"You've got to be kitten me." She throws that in.

The Player laid his head down and closed his eyes in defeat. "Uuuugh…" He groans in pain from the pun.

"I thought FUR sure you were going to agree with me." She gives another one.

"Uuuggghhh…"

Nadia sits back with her index finger and thumb stroking her chin. "I LITTERally thought you'd get a kick out of it."

"Why won't she stop…?" He asked desperately.

Despite how painful it was for him Squigly saw no harm in it. She taps the pen against her bottom lip to find any negatives in Nadia's case but nothing came to mind. "Well…it is part of her character."

"Exactly!" Nadia clapped delightfully now that she had somebody realize the bigger picture. "Keep it in."

"Any objections?" Squigly asked the group.

"Not really." Parasoul answered.

"Nope." Painwheel added.

"Doesn't matter to me. Not like I'll be around her much." Cerebella was the last to input.

Squigly pets the top of the Player's head knowing he had to accept defeat. "Sorry, friend."

"Don't patronize me, Sienna." He raised his head to keep her from petting him.

She grins beyond her stitches and giggles adorably at his reaction. "I'd never do that." There may have been a little bit of sarcasm in her voice but it's a bit hard to tell. Anyway, she got back on topic.

"So…other than that, and less Filia time, everything else are just minor nitpicks." She laid the paper on the table and looks out to the group. "Anything else we need to add?"

Cerebella reaches out and grabs the list. "Actually, yeah. Feng has been getting a bit too much screen time. I'd like to see a little less of her and more of me."

"A bit self-centered don't you think?" The Player asked with his arms folded.

"She'll be fine." Cerebella assured with a cocky smirk. "Besides I'm one of the stars, she's not even a playable character! Ha! Don't tell her I said that though."
Ironically Feng was standing there the entire time, like, since they arrived. She stood there with the world's dullest glare, tapping her foot with one hand on her hip and the other holding a notebook to take their order.

"You realize I've been standing here this entire time right?" Feng asked irately. "I'm your goddamn waitress."

Cerebella had just got done writing and passed the list back to Squigly, it was here she realized Feng was standing by their table. Seeing her Cerebella quickly looks in the other direction.

"Oh crap! Guys, don't look now…but Feng is here." She tried whispering but it was a very poor attempt since her indoor voice was clearly too forced.

Feng rolled her eyes and ignored Cerebella. "Why don't you all order already? You're letting this story run you crazy."

"You know what's crazy?" Painwheel asked.

"What?" Feng responds.

"The fact that you're getting into more chapters than me and I'm a main character." There was clearly some passive aggressiveness being demonstrated. Painwheel ends her statement with that same adorable smile.

The Player's stomach was beginning to rumble, the girls and this role hierarchy they put together was working up an appetite. "She's right. Can we just eat? If you guys are going to work my nerves the least we can do is have some dinner over it."

Just as he opened the menu a loud crash came from above their table and out of the blue Valentine makes a hard faceplant onto their table with a bottle of sake in hand.

Now this came as a complete shock to everyone, it took a good second for everyone to realize she was the cause of the ceiling giving way. Drywall from the ceiling showered upon Valentine's motionless body.

Seeing the nurse laid out on the table made the Player smile. "Wait, is this one of those restaurants where we eat off of naked women?" He reaches over to chopsticks and readied his utensils. "If this is the kind of service they have then I'm eating here every day."

"W-We don't serve food on people!" Feng exclaimed, she reaches out and taps Valentine to see what was wrong. It appeared she was sleep. "Um, excuse me? Ma'am?"

Despite her attempts Valentine didn't move. The group waited to see if she would react but nothing, this only made the Player impatient, Squigly had to pull his hand back for the numerous times he tried touching her unconscious body.

"Is she dead?" Nadia asked rather flatly.

"….HEY!" Valentine quickly rose up and scared everyone. "Huh…? W'ssat? How'dz I get heere?" She looks around and got an eyeful of information, particularly on her company, it wouldn't be until she saw Parasoul and the Player that things started to get familiar. "Aaaaayyyye, itz yew gaiz!" She threw her head back and chugged a large portion of sake without falter. "Itz ben munths since we last…since we last…uuuuhhh…DId a THING!"

"Is she drunk?" Feng seemed a bit hesitant to ask.
Hearing her Valentine jumped off of the table and got in the teen's face, the smell of heavy booze plagued her odor. "I swear to drunk I'm not God…!"

Seeing her like this made Parasoul facepalm but the Player looks on with an amused smile.

Without warning Valentine put Feng in a headlock and forced the sake into her mouth. "Here! See? It's just water!"

Poor Feng desperately tried prying her arm from around her neck as the strain was making it difficult to consume what was being forced down her throat. Her eyes were shot open while trying not to drown, her cheeks were puffy and she tried to forcibly spit out the sake from her mouth since Valentine didn't remove the bottle.

"SooOooooOOoo… What're we doin' here?" She looks back to the group with crimson cheeks and a dazed face. Yes, she was clearly drunk. "How goezith the story?! Fun now that Valentine is out of the pictures? I haven't seen you in like….uhhh…" She held up her hands, finally freeing Feng, who gasped for air hysterically, to show the group 4 fingers "7 chapters…"

Even though it was a poor sight Parasoul faces her to answer. "Yes, we've been around. Just keeping busy. We just recently got done with a Christmas special."

"OH! A Christmas special! GoooooooOooooOood for youuuu!" Valentine took the sake and held it up to her lips only to find the bottle empty which annoyed her greatly. "Y'know MY birthday was on Christmas! I couldn't even get a cameo!"

The Player was in the dark about this and had no idea. He leans over to Parasoul and whispered "Her birthday is on Christmas?".

"Yeah. They didn't tell you?" She whispered back.

"No. I thought it would've been on Valentine's day."

Parasoul shook her head. "No. Her comrade, Christmas, birthday is on Valentine's day."

"…Why is that a thing?" He asked to which Parasoul merely shrugged.

Valentine threw herself back on the table and crawled down to Parasoul's end so that she could get up close and personal to her face. "Whut'chu saiyan 'bout me?"

"I-I'm not saying anything!" The redhead waved her hand in front of her face to try and push the scent of alcohol away from her nose.

"Yew R a LIAR!" The drunken Valentine protested and got closer…a bit too close.

"I'm not!"

Parasoul grabbed onto her shoulders to push her back but Valentine was pretty strong so it was a struggle. They were on the verge of kissing if Valentine kept this up, something the Player was all too keen on seeing judging by his frequent head nodding to encourage their actions, he could even be seen smiling delightfully beside the princess.

Squigly brushes her shoulder against him to get his attention but his eyes refused to leave the two women. "Player, maybe you should stop her."

"No. I want to see where this goes."
Feng wasn't in for all this nonsense and after rubbing her neck and coughing, she jumps on board with Squigly's suggestion. "You better get this under control because I'm not getting fired for you!"

The Player rolled his eyes and faced Feng. "Fired? Why are you even working here? Don't you do stuff for the mafia? In fact…you shouldn't even be in character right now."

"This is where I work!"

"Well get us all some lunchables. Aching for some food, here."

"This is a restaurant, not a supermarket. If you're broke go somewhere else."

Cerebella smacked her hand against the table. "Aye! I said you weren't ordering for me. Feng, get me a steak and a cheeseburger for the cat lady."

"...Didn't I tell you that was racist?" Nadia didn't seem to appreciate the comment.

Squigly extended her index finger to direct attention to her. "I'll have a cheeseburger too."

"A salad should do me good." Painwheel said.

Nadia looks out the corner of her eye, careful to not have Painwheel realize she was staring, she noticed that the young fighter looked a bit skinny. "Girl, you need some real food. Get some meat on those bones." The feline turned to Feng. "She'll have the thickest piece of meat you got on the menu."

Painwheel raised her arms to check her torso, and yeah, she was pretty darn skinny. She lowered her arms and blushed.

Feng wrote everything down on her notepad and left the group, getting away from them seemed to lift a great weight off her shoulders.

"EACH of you are chipping in for your dishes." The Player was adamant on this knowing he didn't have the cash to pay for everybody. The girls didn't appear to be phased by this regardless, so…

Back to the drunk nurse, she gets into the Player's face now. "Why wasn't I invited out to dinner?!"

The invasion of his personal space made him back his head away. "Valentine, you weren't around at the time. Also why are you here?"

"Why am I here? I'm part of Skullgirls too! I deserve every right to be here. I've been watching you all, having your fun and character development, what about Valentine? Where has she been? When does she get her turn in the spotlight?" She seemed a bit sober now since she was able to speak more sensibly, her speech impediment had cleared up a bit too.

"Aren't you one of the antagonists?" He questioned. "Antagonists don't get development."

Slightly aggravated by his statement Valentine pulled a scalpel out from her cleavage and held it up to his throat, antagonizing him. "I'm not a villain! I'm complicated!" She snarled.

The Player was at her mercy and petrified beyond words, this was reasonable considering she was under the influence, but once he noticed she wasn't moving he decides to roll the dice and nod.

"You're right. I apologize."

Valentine's eye filled with water and she drops the scalpel, she throws herself into the Player and
holds him in a fit of tears. "Why?! Why do you close your eyes when we make love?!" She was being hysterical, the booze was still in her system and effecting her better judgement.

The Player was, again, at a loss for words. He looked around the table for assistance but none of the girls knew how to react, giving him casual shrugs as if saying 'I dunno.' and remained silent.

Seeing no other option the Player just pats Valentine's back to comfort her.

"Um…there, there. It'll be alright." Clearly he was just saying that to get her off.

"You're just saying that!" She continued crying, now it was becoming a bit overly exaggerated, almost like she was faking herself.

"No…no…” He assured in hopes of getting the point across "look, we can fix this. We're making notes about things we want changed in the story so how about we write about bringing you back?"

Valentine's whines had calmed to a near instant. She let his explanation sink in before she finally backs away sniffling. "Y-You guys would do that for me?" She asked hopefully.

"Will it make you go away?" He asked.

Valentine nods with…a smile? In a bizarre case of circumstances Valentine was actually being cute. Her adorable smiling face seemed to light up their dimly lit booth, but then again she was drunk so this little reaction most likely wouldn't have mattered.

"Then yes." He states. "We can do that. It doesn't guarantee anything though."

"Woo!" She threw her hands up, she didn't seem to realize she was sitting on her knees while on their table. The surrounding customers were unable to eat in peace because of them and their ruckus.

Parasoul noticed the attention they gained and looks out the window after taking a sip of water from her glass. "Can you get any louder?" She asked sarcastically. "Squigly, you know what to do."

Zombie waifu was already on it, writing down everything needed for Valentine at the bottom of their list. Once she was done she held the paper out to Valentine.

"Ok, that should do it. All we need now is for you to sign your name so-" Out of nowhere she was interrupted by Valentine falling face first into the table and passing out. The sound of the silver wear rattling on the table surface distracted everyone else from eating. "-…Never mind." Squigly cut herself short after that random act.

A/N: Ok, I HAD to do another one of these because I just remembered I completely forgot about Valentine after her fight with Parasoul, once again I'm making fun of myself for forgetting these crucial bits, Valentine getting drunk as a result from watching everyone else remaining relevant is the kicker, it's like she just vanished and it's bad because she worked for Marie so why would she just up and disappear without at least going to check on the Skullgirl, y'know? I'm such a fool lol.

I think I'm going to make omakes whenever I do something dumb rather than making a whole discussion chapter about whatever it may be, it also serves as a way for me to get you laughing. I figure that way I can give you all more Skullgirls when a major chapter isn't dropped, and since they're so short it's easy to make and get out. A few readers told me they enjoyed the original omake so I thought "Hey, why not do another since I failed to remember
another important character?" so now we can get the characters acting like they're actors or whatever, typical anime omake stuff if you're familiar with it.
So after I got done scolding and laughing at myself for forgetting Valentine I found it necessary to start locking myself down when it comes to keeping track of information.

As I go back to look at what I've done up till now I feel readers might be a little confused as to where and when everything takes place because one moment I'm not giving specific dates and then suddenly, in future chapters, I am so to me it just looks very disorganized with occasional references to certain months when a special chapter rolls by, y'know, like for the Halloween special it was October 31st and such.

To remedy this I made a timeline to help keep us all informed on when the chapters take place, using season, month, day etc but I can't use any years since we don't know what year Skullgirls take place, assuming it follows ours. Obviously the time frame is inspired by the 1940's but there's mention of advance technology in other lands and let's not forget we got cyborgs and futuristic cybernetic enhancements that is impossible to have around that time so there can't be any real judgement until we get clarification by Alex Ahad and the Skullgirls team. To keep things simple we'll just start by Year 0 and move up from there.

I wrote in bold italics for the events from the actual games to further give insight on when things in this story cross into the games narrative so bridging them together can be a bit easier. I'm only using characters we know about so far, so those who didn't appear (Beowulf, Big Band, Eliza, etc) are purposely left out. It's also because of this connections to certain characters already established can't be written either but that should all be cleared up later.

I really wish I could've used bullet points and use proper indentation but there doesn't seem to be an option for it on this sight so it may still look a little messy...unless there is and I'm just not doing it right, if so let me know how to do all that in PM's so I can get on that. For now let's see if this is passable, I never wrote a timeline so there's a first for everything.

- **Year 0** -

**Before Skullgirls**

- Double gives Selene Contiello the Skull Heart as a birthday gift.

- Black Dahlia and the Medici's massacre the Contiello family.

- Sienna "Squigly" Contiello dies.

- Selene Contiello uses the Skull Heart to wish for her family back but becomes the Skullgirl.

- Roberto Contiello requests Leviathan to protect Squigly.

- Squigly is revived by Leviathan and helps fight the current Skullgirl.
- The Grand War takes place, destroying the home of Marie and her best friend Patricia which would become No Man's Land.

- Nancy Renoir becomes the Skullgirl and Squigly remains asleep due to the events taking place in No Man's Land.

- The warring kingdoms join forces to stop Nancy's carnage.

- Nancy dies from the efforts of the allied nations.

- Marie and Patricia become slaves in a slave trade run by the Medici's.

- Patricia is violently mutilated for her rebelliousness as an example to the other children.

- Marie escapes her captors.

- Double's story from Skullgirls begins.

- Marie is given the Skull Heart by Double.

- Samson becomes Filia's parasite.

- Valentine and Peacock's origin story from Skullgirls mobile begins.

- Valentine encounters Carol for the first time.

- Carol becomes Painwheel.

- Painwheel's origin story from Skullgirls mobile begins.

- Cerebella's origin story from Skullgirls mobile begins.

- The Last Hope die in No Man's Land.

- Nadia swallows the Life Gem.

- The Fishbone gang is killed by the Medici's.

- Marie recruits Valentine to her faction.

- Painwheel's story from Skullgirls begins.

- Year 1 -
  Autumn

September 24th

- The Player meets Umbrella and arrives in the Canopy Kingdom. Shortly after he disembarks he runs into Nadia Fortune and finds himself in Little Innsmouth.

- Ms. Fortune's story from Skullgirls begins.

- After witnessing Nadia's decapitation at the hands of Lawrence the Player flees Little Innsmouth. Hours of aimless wandering led the Player to New Meridian where he stumbles upon the MadMan's Café.
- **Filia’s story from Skullgirls begin.**

  - The Player protects Filia from being sexually harassed by Ricardo and offers to help with her amnesia, befriending her in the process. He also meets Samson for the first time and is introduced to Parasites.

  - Filia encounters Painwheel whom she identifies as an old friend named Carol.

  - Painwheel escapes to the Grand Cathedral where the Player and Filia follow. The group meets Valentine and Double for the first time.

  - Filia fights Double.

  - The Player meets the Skullgirl, Marie, for the first time.

  - Marie reveals the Player is an important and crucial figure in their world.

  - Filia is defeated by Double but is rescued by the Player before being killed.

  - After getting Filia to safety the Player finds them shelter at Poorman’s Hotel in New Meridian.

  - Brain Drain creates Fukua. [Non-Canon]

  - Aeon and Venus are revealed to be watching everything that is going on in the Skullgirls universe.

  **September 25th**

  - Fukua’s chapter takes place in a dream world.

  - **Fukua’s story from Skullgirls begin.** [Non-Canon]

    - The Player cross paths with Vitale Medici for the first time and is taken to Cirque des Cartes at gunpoint.

  - **Cerebella’s story from Skullgirls begins.**

    - The Player teams up with Cerebella to find the Life Gem.

    - Under the Player’s guidance Cerebella finds Little Insmouth and Nadia.

    - Cerebella fights Nadia to a draw, the latter reveals she swallowed the Life Gem which is the source of her immortality and body manipulation.

    - Nadia flees to pursue the Skullgirl.

    - The Player takes Cerebella to Poorman’s Hotel to treat her injuries.

    - Cerebella meets Filia and Samson for the first time and reveals she works for the Medici’s, whom Samson is familiar with. Over the course of a few hours the trio bond.

    - The Player and Cerebella leave the hotel to search for Nadia. Due to his last encounter with Marie the duo make the Grand Cathedral their first visit only to find Nadia with Valentine and Double.

    - Valentine and Double fight the Player and Cerebella, proving to be more than enough for them. During the scramble Nadia sneaks off to find Marie.
- The Player unintentionally initiates Heart-Syncing for the first time with Cerebella.

- Cerebella subdues Valentine with her powered-up abilities forcing Double and Valentine to make a tactical retreat.

- Marie's uses a Psyche-Link to reach the Player subconsciousness. She informs him that Cerebella's fate ends with her losing the purity in her soul because of the Medici's influence. Marie establishes her vendetta against the Medici's and plan to eradicate them all.

- Marie tests Cerebella's resolve by presenting an illusion of the Skull Heart. The Player convinces Cerebella to ignore the wish but Nadia appears in an attempt to use the Skull Heart to revive her fallen friends.

- Cerebella nearly kills Nadia to retrieve the Life Gem but the Player intervenes and talks her out of it. Nadia escapes the cathedral as do the Player and Cerebella shortly after.

- Cerebella accepts the Player as a friend and ally for keeping her from killing Nadia.

- The Player is arrested by the Black Egrets for aiding and abetting the mafia.

**September 26th**

- **Parasoul's story from Skullgirls begin.**

- Parasoul takes Umbrella to see the criminals she's arrested and discover the Player among the prison cells.

- Umbrella introduces Parasoul to the Player for the first time. Parasoul is revealed to be familiar with the Player by alias.

- Cerebella takes Filia clothes shopping and the Player tags along.

- Nancy Renoir is revealed to have been the previous Skullgirl in Parasoul's research.

- Queen Nancy has written memos of the Player during her time as the Skullgirl but much of what she wrote is left vague. The 'Thread of Fate', which is a series of predestined events that connects multiple souls to one conclusion that traces back to the Skull Heart, is also mentioned.

- Marie becomes active around Canopy, specifically Maplecrest. Umbrella senses the Skullgirl and leaves the Renoir castle to find Marie, under the impression that her presence was actually Nancy.

- Umbrella runs into the Player and Filia after they depart with Cerebella. Umbrella explains the situation of her search which prompts the duo to help her find what she's searching for.

- Marie appears in New Meridian where Parasoul, Umbrella and the Player were all gathered.

- **Squigly's story from Skullgirls begin.**

- Squigly and Leviathan awaken due to Marie's rampage.

- The Player meets Squigly and Leviathan for the first time.

- Marie leads an assault against Lorenzo at the Medici tower. The Medici's escape and Marie is left weakened from using so much power, she retreats to her hideout at the Grand Cathedral. During the chaos Squigly escapes into New Meridian in order to avoid fighting Parasoul.
- Valentine reveals to Parasoul that Umbrella is a valuable contender to be the next Skullgirl if anything were to happen with Marie.

- Parasoul fights Valentine as a distraction while the Player goes to rescue Umbrella.

- Squigly meets Filia for the first time in Little Innsmouth. Leviathan and Samson reveal history with one another before having their hosts engage in a fight. Squigly demonstrates a strong lead against Filia and emerges victorious.

- The Player teams up with Squigly and Leviathan to search for Umbrella and Marie at the Grand Cathedral.

- Squigly and Leviathan are brought up to speed on the events of Canopy Kingdom during their sleep. Squigly discovers she was asleep for 14 years after missing Nancy's role as the Skullgirl.

- Selene Contiello is revealed to have been a previous Skullgirl, before Nancy Renoir.

- The Player and Squigly establish their friendship before heading to the Grand Cathedral.

- Double awaits the group at the cathedral and engages them in combat once Filia arrives to assist them.

- Filia is revealed to be a Medici by blood by Double.

- Marie explains the Player's unique ability to bestow phenomenal power to people he bonds with in their world.

- Heart-Syncing is established for the first time by Filia by who unleashes a devastating assault against Double.

- The Grand Cathedral is destroyed and Double is presumed dead.

- Filia and Squigly meet Marie for the first time who the Player considers an ally and friend.

- Marie and Squigly explain the crimes and horror of the Medici's as well as the Skull Heart.

- Filia cuts her ties with the past and looks toward the future with the Player and Squigly. Squigly leaves Marie to recover per the Player's request which allows her to remain awake.

- The Player returns Umbrella to Parasoul.

- Squigly is invited to live at Poorman's Hotel by Filia.

**Between September 27th and October 18th**

- The downtown area of New Meridian and the Grand Cathedral was closed for reconstruction.

- The Medici's fled New Meridian to lay low from the Skullgirl.

- Marie hides away in a safe haven below the ruins of the Grand Cathedral to replenish her health.

- The Black Egrets continue searching for the Medici's, Marie and Valentine.

- Valentine goes MIA.

- Umbrella recovers.
- Parasoul trains Umbrella in an undisclosed location far away from New Meridian and Canopolis.

- The Player gets a job at Beefy Royalty and meets Feng.

October 20th

- The Player continues learning Heart Syncing with Filia as his primary partner.

- Filia and Squigly land a temporary job at Beefy Royalty to help pay for rent and groceries.

- Feng meets Filia and Squigly for the first time.

- The Player is revealed to have been visiting Marie since the incident in New Meridian, bringing her food and company.

- Marie has a flashback revealing she was once an orphan and slave before coming across Double who presents the Skull Heart which would ultimately lead to her role as the current Skullgirl.

- Peacock, who was once known as Patricia, is revealed to have been created by the Anti-Skullgirl Lab to deal with Marie and all future Skullgirls.

October 23rd

- Carol turns 16 years old.

October 31st

- A Nightmare in Canopy special takes place.

Between November 1st and November 24th

- Squigly turns 29 years old.

- Nadia turns 21 years old.

Winter

Between December 1st and December 23rd

- Parasoul searches for the perfect Christmas gift to give Umbrella.

- Filia gets a job to buy Christmas for the Player and Squigly.

- Squigly gets a job to buy Christmas gifts for the Player and Filia.

- Parasoul turns 26 years old.

December 24th

- Parasoul leaves Umbrella in the Player's care while she continues searching for gifts.

- The Player, Cerebella, Feng and Nadia engage in a snowball fight against Umbrella, Filia and Squigly.

- The Player helps Parasoul find a gift for Umbrella
- Filia creates a lucky charm for the Player.

- The Player adopts a homeless Labrador he names Butterscotch.

**December 25th**

- Valentine turns 28 years old.

- Parasoul gives Umbrella a friendship charm as a Christmas gift to symbolize her love for her sister.

- Butterscotch is given to Filia as a gift from the Player.

- Marie has made a complete recovery and regained her strength.

- The Player gives Marie a friendship charm as a Christmas gift.

- Year 2 -

**January 1st**

- The New Year begins

TBD

A/N: Alright, so I think that's about all for now but if I missed something chances are I'm gonna add it at a later date until I decide to do another one in which case I may delete this one and remake it but with the updated info, another alternative would be to just keep this up and when making another timeline I'll call it "Intermission: Timeline Updated" or something like that. That's assuming its even necessary, which it probably won't be if this served its purpose of providing enough insight for everybody.

If I kept up with regular updates and stopped dropping muse back in 2014 Filia would be turning 20 years old in the story right about now but because of my inconsistencies she'll be 17 come March, I gotta think of birthday specials for the girls...oh god, don't hold me to that because that'll just mean I have to do that every year and I doubt I'd keep a schedule considering how much I got on my plate lol.

Thanks for reading over this by the way. I really wanted to get this off my chest so I can make up for just suddenly throwing in dates to establish time. Also, as of me posting this, reviews are not going through and I can't see them when they're posted so if you submit a review I ask you send it to me via PM. Not sure if its a problem the site is having or if its just me but until then hit me up there.
Filia laid soundly asleep in bed, she was alone so chances were that Squigly was out doing her own thing. After a moment of silence she begins to awaken, she gently wipes the sleep out of her eye and looks over to the clock on the nightstand beside her.

"...8pm? Did I go to bed too early? I don't even remember when I fell asleep...story of my life." Finding that she didn't remember caused her to giggle, considering she's an amnesiac, how cliché it must've look even if it was only for sleep. "Samson. Samson, are you up?"

There was no response, and surprisingly enough no distractingly loud snoring from her parasite. If he really was sleep she wouldn't want to disturb him so she left her head alone, she appeared like a normal girl, almost like Samson wasn't there.

The bedroom door opens and catches her attention, the Player entered and discovered she was up. He had a tray of food, mostly likely dinner for the night, and a milkshake, Filia's favorite.

"Ah, so you're up." He said with a warm smile. He closed the door behind himself and approaches the bed with the food. "I had a feeling you'd be up by now so I brought some food."

The smell was delicious and steam was still visible, it was fresh out the oven. "My goodness. It looks like Squigly really outdid herself." Filia comments as she sat up on the side of the bed.

"Squigly?" The Player questions with a chuckle. "Nah. I actually prepared this."

"You did?"

"Mhm. I've been learning how to cook. I wanted to see if I could make your taste buds sing."

He put the tray on nightstand and the very sight of it nearly made Filia drool. Her pupils took the appearance of hearts and she could feel her hunger growing, she would've dug in if not for the Player placing his hands upon her shoulders and slowly lowering her onto her backside as he towered over her.

This new development struck Filia speechless, she had no idea what he was doing and didn't know how to react but as they laid there in silence she rediscovered the ability to speak, "What are you doing?" she asked curiously but not alarmed.

He lowered his eyes, giving her a charming glance, their eyes locked in an intense stare down. "Filia, I have to come clean and tell you something."

"Tell me something?"

"Yes. You see, well... I like you."

"Thumpthump..."

Filia could swear she heard her heartbeat for a moment as he revealed his secret. Her eyes widen and she didn't say a word, the shock on her face spoke volumes for her.

"I really do like you, Filia." He says again to really nail it in. "I like you a lot. In fact, I think it's bordering on love. There's never a moment when I'm not thinking of you."

She looks away, cheeks red as roses and if that weren't enough her body felt this unique fire that just
set her soul ablaze, her heart was even beating at an accelerated rate. Amidst the sudden whirlpool of emotions she knew she had to answer him.

"Y-You're not being yourself…you know that right?" She just couldn't make eye contact no matter how many times she told herself to face him like a woman. She instead provides a tender smile and closes her eyes, clenching her fist for support. "But…hearing that come from you makes me really happy. It feels like my heart is going to pop out of my chest."

"Filia…"

Hearing her name be uttered so affectionately caused her open her eyes and meet his gaze. The two look deep into each other's eyes and before they could dwell on it any longer the Player lowers himself down her face. Filia once again closes her eyes and lets herself get taken away in the moment.

"Filia…" Her name was called out from the darkness. "Filia. Filia!" In fact the voice didn't belong to the Player, it was too gruff and masculine. "Filia, wake the hell up!" It was all becoming clear, that voice belonged to her parasite.

Filia is seen lying in bed again but now she was having her cheeks being pulled by Samson who was apparently being suffocated in the pillow now that she was laying on her back. She opened her eyes to the feeling and quickly jumped up after she hadn't realized what was going on.

"Ah! What's going on?! Huh…? Wait, what? Samson?"

Samson was gasping for air now that he was finally free and released her face to place his hand over his chest, he never felt more relieved than having the ability to breathe properly again.

"What was that for?! You tryin' to kill me?"

"Kill you? No! Why would I ever do that? I was just…" She pulled her legs up and cradled her knees close to her chest "having a dream." she clarified with a small blush appearing now that she was thinking about it.

"Must've been one hell of a nightmare based on all that turning you were doing."

"…Not necessarily. But let's not dwell on it! It's not important." Now that she was actually up she looks over to her clock and sees the correct time, it was 8:35am, the day was just getting started. "Oh right, good morning, Samson!"

"Yeah, yeah. Let's get something to eat, I'm starvin' over here."

"Breakfast is sounding good but not before we get cleaned up first."

This was the part of the day Samson hated, aside from being washed with shampoo. He was a parasite so he found no reason in grooming himself like a human but Filia made him do it all, washing his face, brushing his teeth, giving him mouthwash, brushing him with a soft brush and so on.

Once the duo were spruced up they made their way downstairs, the Player, Squigly and Leviathan were already sitting at the table and enjoying the first meal of the day.

Leviathan was the first to notice them and greets Filia with a smile. "Good morning, miss Filia." His comment got the attention of the others who look in her direction. "Oh, and, uh, you too, Samson." The serpent grimaced at the latter.
"Bite me." Samson retorts, countering his words with a vulgar middle finger. Since Leviathan was a part of Squigly it appeared he was giving her the finger in the eyes of the parasite.

Leviathan extends his body across Squigly in a defensive posture. "You better watch who you're directing that to." He snarls.

"Or what?" Samson challenged his rival by growing out his tendrils to two arms so he could put on display two middle fingers at him.

Leviathan ignites his fiery breath and was ready to fight believing Samson was giving both him and his host the finger but Squigly wraps her hand around his head to prevent a fight. It was a bit early for that.

"Now, now. There's no need for violence, Lev."

Squigly was all Leviathan needed to calm himself, she was able to calm him down faster than he was willing to fight. "I apologize for my uncouth behavior. Samson just riles me up and I feel his deeds cannot go unpunished. Especially when it comes to you."

"Newsflash," Samson jumped in "I was giving YOU the finger, worm. Not her."

Leviathan had no reason to pay Samson any mind now that Squigly had his attention but this only annoyed Samson, the brutish parasite growled with an intense look in his eye...he was certainly ready to rumble.

"You two are always fighting." The Player comments on their behavior after taking a bite out of his syrup clad pancake. "Why not just get married?"

"Don't YOU start." Samson groaned regretfully now that the Player spoke.

"Hey, I'm just saying." The Player didn't provoke any drama, which is kind of new, and proceeded to drink some of his freshly squeezed OJ. "Besides its valentine's day. It's supposed to be a day of love and passion."

Filia gasped and took at the calendar which was hung on the side of the fridge, it was February 14th. "Oh! I didn't know it was valentine's day already."

"I'm surprised you would forget." Squigly says looking over to her. "Considering you're such a big fan of romance and the sort."

"Right?" The Player had to agree with Squigly and ate the last bits of his breakfast. Now that he was done he put the plate in the sink and stretched. "I'd hate to eat and run but do you think you can handle the dishes for me, Sienna?"

"Where are you going?" Filia asked.

"Work. It's almost 9, just because it's valentine's day doesn't mean I get the day off." He answered with a minor laugh. "Even still it's only valentine's day."

Filia pouts and turns her gaze to the side, a bit displeased. "It's not 'just' valentine's day. It's a day where you spend time with that special someone, where you actually show that you care and love them. Getting them cards, chocolate, laying down rose petals in the bed, lighting candles...heh...hehehe..." She was beginning to drift off in thought, Filia was blushing heavily the deeper she dove in wonderland.
The Player, Squigly, Leviathan and even Samson noticed this daze Filia was in and were beginning to worry if she'd ever come out of it.

Samson snapped his fingers right in her ear to wake her up. "Um, hello?! Earth to Filia! Wake up!"

"...Oh! Wait, what?"

"You were spacing out and it was starting to get creepy. You must have an active imagination if you got lost in it that fast, kid."

The blush on Filia's cheeks remained as she smiled and swooned at the butterflies she was getting in her stomach. "Sorry. I can't help it. Valentine's day just brings out the best in me!"

Samson stuck out his tongue at the idea of all the warmth and 'lovey' stuff Filia was gawking over. "It all sounds like a bore if you ask me." He said.

"Well it's a good thing nobody asked you." Leviathan remarks under his breath.

"What was that, worm?!"

Leviathan remained mindful of his own business, taking up his teacup by coiling his tail around the handle and having a drink, ignoring Samson's frustration.

"Ugh. Whatever...I just don't see the appeal in it." Samson continued on. "Seriously, what's the point in celebrating a single day dedicated to others? What makes it different from any other day? Are you only supposed to care for that one instance?"

Filia sighs and shakes her head at Samson, he was giving off some real buzzkill vibes which was killing her mood. "It's just a fun thing to celebrate, ok? Jeez." She spoke rather quickly hinting at mild annoyance. Filia took this quite seriously.

"Feisty." Squigly comments with a charmed smile to Leviathan who nods in agreement.

The Player grabbed his coat off the back of his chair and bundled up for the cold weather. "Thanks again for cooking, Sienna. It was delicious. I'll see you guys soon."

"No problem." Squigly said while waving. "Have a good day at work"

"And be safe." Leviathan added.

"Always." He replies while zipping the coat up.

Thump, thump...

There it was again. That all too familiar sound of a steady heartbeat that Filia knew all too well. She stood in a frozen state, maintaining an empty smile as she watched the Player ready to head out the door. She wanted to move but remained still, it was like her legs didn't want to move but her heart was trying to get her in gear.

Thumpthump...! Thumpthump...!

The Player reaches out for the doorknob and the conflicted Filia closed her eyes to collect her thoughts but as he turned the doorknob she found the strength she needed. "Wait!" She reached out her hand to him, getting both his and Squigly's attention.

"Me?" He questioned. What's up?"
"I…uh. I mean…well, you see… T-The thing is…I was, just sort of- No! I- um…"

This was certainly unlike Filia. Seeing her in this stuttering and nervous state struck Squigly and Leviathan as curious behavior whereas the Player and Samson were finding it a little weird considering she was never like this.

It appeared even Filia knew she was choking as the stares coming from her friends made her freeze up once more, her cheeks alight with a rosy tint and her mouth curled into a shy and cute smile. "Uuuuuu… I-

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Samson asked out of the blue.

Her parasites comment snapped Filia out of this minor trance and she grabs onto him by pulling his face. "S-Shut up!"

"AAAH! What I do? What I do?!" Samson asked frantically with enlarged circular yellow eyes and his tongue sticking out in the air.

The Player furrowed a brow at Filia and checked his nonexistent watch for the time. "So, like, was there anything you wanted to say?"

"Eh?!" Filia then realized he was talking to her which prompted her to cease her face pulling actions without releasing Samson. "…I-" She tried again but couldn't do it, so instead she completely changes her mind and bows to him. "I hope you have a good day!"

Was that all she had to say? The Player wasn't sure how to respond but he nods his head as a last resort and smiles. "I will. Thanks. Don't forget to feed Butterscotch when he gets up."

"I will." She replies and raised her head.

The Player departs and locks the door behind himself. Now it was just the girls and their parasites. Filia sighs heavily and bonks herself on the head multiple times much to Samson's mild annoyance.

"Y'know we share space up here, right?" Samson asked.

"…Right. Sorry." She sighs with her eyes closed, unable to believe how much of a fool she made of herself. "Stupid. Stupid. Stupid." With a bit of a scolding she finally opened her eyes but once she did Squigly was up close and personal with a wide smile.

"That was painful." Squigly comments teasingly.

"What do you mean…?"

"Don't play innocent with me. You were going to ask him to be your valentine's day date!"

Squigly saying this aloud didn't help Filia's situation at all, if anything it was about to make it worse now that Samson got wind of it.

"Wait, what?!" Samson exclaimed in horror.

Filia throws both her hands into Squigly's stitched mouth as if trying to silence her. "NO! YOU WEREN'T SUPPOSED TO KNOW!"

Squigly narrowed her eye and placed her hands on her hips. "You know I don't speak with my mouth, right?" Her speech remained unaffected by Filia's attempts, since, of course, she speaks via her space-manipulation power. In that very instant Filia realized her attempt was pointless and just
removed her hands, revealing a clever, asymmetrical smirk from the singer which hinted at a bit of smarm.

"Why me?" Filia questioned with her head down in defeat.

Samson was still shocked to hear this and, honesty, it made him feel nauseous to a degree. "K-Kid, there's no way in hell that's what all that was about! Seriously?!"

"Samson, please. Don't make it sound so bad. Don't you think it'll be nice to just-

"No! NO! NOOOO!" He didn't even give her time to explain and placed his tendrils over his eyes in horror. "It wasn't supposed to be this way! Where did I go wrong?!"

"How unsightly." Leviathan says in disgust at Samson's juvenile behavior. "Lady Filia, please pay that ingrate no mind. You shouldn't let him make you feel bad for wanting to celebrate today."

Squigly nods in agreement. "Yeah. I think it's cute."

"Why are you two encouraging this?!" Samson asks the pair in concern.

"Why not?" Squigly countered. "She just wants to spend valentine's day with a friend."

"Oh, sure. That's how it always starts. Then later there's dating and all that nonsense."

Leviathan narrowed his eyes at Samson knowing full well he was going to make this difficult. "Are you really willing to make your host unhappy for the sake of your own selfishness? You're awful."

The seriousness in his tone was really showing how much disdain the serpent had for Samson, he began to wonder if this was the same parasite he was once close to. "How we ever had any camaraderie in the past is beyond me."

"What do you know, Leviathan?"

"I know Filia deserves better than you."

"My heart is bleeding." Samson sarcastically remarked.

The tension between the two was becoming apparent and Squigly intervenes. "Now, now. Let's not make a scene." She says calmly being the voice of reason. "We've all been friends for a few months now, right? So why not just let them have their fun?" Her questions were directed toward Samson.

"I just..." Samson tried taking a moment to think but he couldn't seem to grasp a solid answer. "I don't know." Was all he could say before sighing. "I mean, ugh, why HIM though?"

"What's wrong with him?" Filia asked.

"He's a selfish ass!" Samson answered.

The irony nearly gave Leviathan a headache and he drowns himself out of Samson's statement with more tea.

Filia pouts at this claim. "You're not exactly being considerate yourself." She defended with a bit of truth.

"You think I'm more selfish than he is? He doesn't let Squigly leave the hotel!"

"True." Squigly nods with a bit of biased.
"He does that to protect her." Filia corrects. "If the royal family ever found out that Squigly was undead with the Skullgirl still around then there would surely be problems."

"…Also true." Squigly had to agree albeit sullenly. "And I doubt they would listen to reason if I told them Leviathan keeps me from losing my free will. What with parasites being taboo and all."

"See?" Filia asked Samson. "He has his reasons. He's a bit overprotective…like you. Actually, you two have more in common than you think."

"What?! We are NOTHING alike!"

Squigly let that line sink in for a bit before coming to a conclusion, "That sounds like something the Player would say." she said. If she could stick out her tongue to playfully tease him she would.

Samson groaned and crossed his tendrils like he was folding his arms. He huffed and paid the girls no mind. "Whatever… Do what you want. If he does something dumb I'm going to break his legs."

"You really mean that Samson?!" Filia's eyes enlarged at Samson's willingness to accept.

"Of course I mean it. Why wouldn't I break his legs?"

"N-No… Before that. About letting me ask."

"Oh. Yeah, sure. Why not. I hate the idea but if I don't let you have your way I'll never hear the end of it."

Filia nearly squeals but keeps her cool, she instead pets Samson's head. "You're such a sweetheart when you want to be." Samson just flicks her hand away and continues pouting like a child.

Squigly smiles happily now that Samson was being a bit more open. Now that they had that out of the way it was time for more important matters. Squigly grabs Filia by the shoulders and forced her down in her chair at the kitchen table.

"Squigly, what are you doing?" Filia asked.

"After seeing your performance earlier I have decided to take it upon myself to teach you the basics of handling a valentine's day date." Squigly fixed Filia's breakfast plate while explaining, it was still good and warm so there was no need to reheat. She sat the plate down in front of her and stood proudly.

Filia looks down to her plate and then back at Squigly with an uncertain look. "You're going to teach me? But…Squigly, didn't you say you never had any dating experience? What can you teach if you've never been romantically involved with anyone?"

That proud stance Squigly once held immediately turned into a depressing sit down in the corner of woe under dramatic spotlight, she had her back turned against Filia with her arms wrapped around her knees.

"…You didn't have to say it like that." Squigly says in a moody tone.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!" Filia protests adorably while bearing a sense of guilt.

Samson shook his head knowing this was what he agreed to. "This is going to suck." He mutters to himself.
Lesson 1: First Date Preparations

Now that Filia had eaten a good breakfast and Squigly recovered from that emotional episode the girls move things to the front room where Squigly was ready to teach, to assist her she had a white board and black marker. Her student, Filia, sat on the couch with Butterscotch on her lap.

"Good morning, class!" She was starting this already in character. "My name is Sienna Contiello and I will be your instructor for today. The lecture will be shared with my handsome assistant, Leviathan."

"The pleasure's all mine." Leviathan bows his head to the group.

"Aren't you taking this a bit too seriously?" Samson asked with a look of boredom.

SMACK!

Squigly struck the whiteboard with a ruler causing everyone, except Leviathan, to flinch. "No disruptions during class." She said with a stern glare, Samson shivered mildly and took his challenging eyes elsewhere. "Now! The first and most important rule of any date is what?"

It took Filia a little bit to realize Squigly was asking her this question. "Oh. The first and most important rule of any date is…um. Compliments?"

"Wrong." Squigly states and begins writing with her marker. "The first and most important thing are the preparations. You have to look good and have confidence in your appearance. If you don't respect yourself your date never will."

"I see. I see."

Squigly goes on to draw, although crudely, a few products to help with this. "Lipstick, eyeliner, eyeshadow, deodorant, lotion, powders, concealers and brushes are all good ways to ready yourself for a date. Also, never leave the house without breath refreshments. I can't stress this enough, fresh mouth is the best mouth and as a young lady I will not tolerate anything less."

She was a mom now? Filia was amazed at how serious Squigly was taking this but she appreciated it in the long run. Most of the first lesson was just common knowledge anyway so Filia got it.

Lesson 2: The Interview

"Ok, now we move onto conversation. What is the first thing you do when he takes you out?"

"Mmmm. Ask him how his day was?"

"Wrong!" Her voice was pretty strong and the echo only made it that more apparent which made Filia yelp. "You dig deep and get as much information as you possibly can. Knowledge is power for a woman and on a date this is essential. You can ask him about his day once you get the serious questions out of the way."

"O-Ok… What are the serious questions?"

"I'm glad you asked. Leviathan will play the role of the Player and I will be you."

A bit of roleplay was sounding a bit fun, Filia sat on the edge of her seat with an enthusiastic smile. Leviathan angled himself so that he could face Squigly directly to give the illusion they were face to
"Ready, Lev?"

"Of course."

"Ok. So, 'Player', I'm really glad we finally have the chance to see each other under these circumstances. I was so nervous this morning I could barely get my head together."

"It's no trouble. I'm actually really happy to be here with you. We seem to have such good chemi-"

"How's your mother?" Squigly suddenly asks which took Leviathan off guard.

"Huh? My mother?"

"Yeah. I'd like to know that." She continued smiling as if she did nothing wrong. "I like to know that I'm the first woman in a man's life."

"Uh, well, that's-"

"I don't like to share my spouse."

"Heh…hehe…um, yeah, I can underst-"

"Let me ask you another question." She just kept interrupting and saw no fault in her actions. She was becoming less of a date and more of an interrogator. "Was your last girlfriend pretty?"

Leviathan was becoming increasingly uncertain of how to act in this situation. He just looks at Squigly and she looks back at him. If a fly flew in and landed on the surface of her eye she'd probably remain unflinching. Filia continued to observe but felt things were taking a turn she wasn't too sure about.

"My…last girlfriend? Is that really impor-"

"I mean - is she prettier than me?"

"…"

"...."

There was a moment of awkward silence. "N-No?" Leviathan hesitantly answered with a question.

"Show me her picture. Are you still associated with her? Are you friends? Do you talk to her? I don't like that. Where does she live? How can I get to her? How does she sleep? Why does she sleep? Do you see each other often?"

This would go on for a few minutes…

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**Lesson 3: Dress to Impress**

The third lesson begins with Squigly trying to fit Filia into a red slim fit mermaid inspired dress which was clearly too small for her but that didn't stop Squigly from trying, even if it came at the expense of Filia's ability to breathe. There was a persistent zipper that just refused to zip in the back.

"Rrgh! Come on. Come on!" Squigly grunts were becoming more strained the harder she tried but
with each attempt she made a tiny bit of progress.

Filia was trying her best to endure how tight the dress was hugging her chubby build. "S-Squigly, how long is this going to take?"

"Just one last thing…all I need to do is get this one last zipper up so your back won't be so exposed!"

"Maybe this just isn't-" The zipper gave in just a bit and allowed Squigly to pull it up mid-way which caused the front to squeeze on Filia's chest "-MEANT FOR ME!" she broke out into a high-pitched voice, eyes widened and teeth gritted from the sudden force. "Can't breathe! Can't breathe!"

Squigly pokes out her bottom lip in disappointment considering she made a big leap in progress but she complied and undid the zipper, allowing Filia to breathe.

"And we almost had it."

Filia inhaled and exhaled in relief but began to undress. "I don't think that's for me."

"You don't like it?" Squigly asked.

"It's not that I don't like it, it's just too small. I'm not slender like you."

"Time to lose some weight." Samson suggested. "Before we got paired up you were quite slim but now you're nearly overweight for your age."

"SAMSON!" Filia wasn't happy to hear all this information which made her feel conscious about her weight and body.

Squigly covered her mouth with her sleeve and shook her head. "That was rude." She comments.

"Samson was never the type to think before speaking, unfortunately." Leviathan says.

Filia was down to her underwear and pinched her sides only to find she was grabbing too much belly fat. "Mmmmmmmmm." She groaned sadly. "I'm starting to get second thoughts."

"What? Why?" Squigly asked in concern.

"I'm…fat. Or at least I'm getting there. Why would he want that?"

"Are you serious? Do you really think he'll say no because you have curves?"

"Have you seen the way he looks at other girls? That nurse or Parasoul? They all have slender bodies and I don't."

"Filia, what did I say in lesson 1? 'You need to have confidence in your appearance. If you don't respect yourself your date never will.', you've been around him for so long but it seems you're acting like you know nothing about him."

Filia stood in silence and dropped her arms, perhaps she was overthinking and was worried about nothing. What was the worse he's ever done? Playfully make fun of her thighs but it was only out of friendly banter. Casting aside her doubts she began to wonder if it's because of that she's interested in spending her valentine's day with him. Not only that she doesn't really know any other guys.

Butterscotch approached and sat by Filia's feet, she felt his fur and looks down to see his adorable face. She blossomed into a smile and went back to happy thoughts. She crouched down to pick the puppy up and held him close.
"You're right. You're absolutely right. In fact, why am I even like this?" She asked herself aloud having just realized where her mind was. "...I'm never like this so why am I suddenly acting like it now? He's a good friend and there's no way he'd be displeased with how I look because...he knows I'll choke him out with my leg headlock if he says something smart."

Seeing Filia joke around, sort of, made Squigly and Leviathan smile now that she regained her former confidence. "That's the Filia I know." Squigly says. "Now get some clothes on. We've got 47 more lessons to get through."

"HUH?! There's more...?"

"Of course there's more. You think dating is a three step process? OOOOOH Hohohoho!" Filia's naïveté earned her the noblewoman's laugh from Squigly to which Filia reacts with a scrunched up face. "My dear Filia, as my student I expected more from you but as you're still just a child I am willing to overlook this minor error of thinking."

Now she was getting a bit ahead of herself. Filia narrows her eyes and slowly peers her eyes off in the other direction, trying not to acknowledge that Squigly just said that.

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February 14th
4:45pm

Filia and Squigly stood before one another, locked in a tense stare down like they were enemies waiting for the other to make a move. Squigly nudges her mouth and Filia visibly swallows a chunk of saliva to brace for whatever Squigly was prepared to throw at her.

The teacher holds her ruler into the air and delivers a swift slap to the whiteboard, pointing to one of the blank underlines. "When another woman passes by and gives your date a flirty look what do you do?!"

"Grab her by the hair and toss her into the nearest pond!"

Squigly points to another question with a blank answer. "You're going out on a date and he chooses to wear a different cologne. What do you ask?!"

"Whats the bitches name!?"

She goes onto the third question. "The quickest way to a man's heart is-?!"

"Through his stomach!"

To mix it up Squigly throws her ruler to a random of the 100 questions rather than going down in order. "If he can't use your comb-!"

"Don't bring him home!"

"Love is-?!"

"War!"

She throws the ruler to the side and stomps her foot on the table. "Your heart is-?!"

"A battleground!" Filia answers before mimicking Squigly's actions by placing her foot beside hers. A single tear formed in Squigly's eye as she clenched her fist in success. "...All answers are correct!"
She opens her hand and throws it to the side, slamming her palm into Filia's where they locked hands, the force was so great the clap echoed throughout the room and all that remained was a victorious stinging sensation between them.

"Of course. What else did you expect?" Filia questioned with a sharp look.

Seeing how far her student has come made Squigly sniffle. "It's about time for his shift to be over. Now go out and show him your warrior pride. You might not have a dress but we'll get something in your size later, your uniform should suffice. Make me proud!"

"Yes, sensei!"

"...What the hell is even going on anymore?" Samson asked in complete exhaustion.

Filia put the usual her hat over her parasite and marched out the hotel room with pride. She was amped-up and after all the hours she put into the lessons, special bubble bathing to get her skin to perfection and aromatherapy to boost her spirits there was no way she wasn't ready.

Squigly locked the door and placed her back against the wall, sighing in relief now that it was all over. "She's gonna go far, Lev. She's gonna go far."

"I would imagine so. You put her through some of the most intense training I've ever seen. I...actually didn't know you were capable of being a love guru." He purposely left out the topic of never dating anyone.

"Of course. It works in modern TV and movies so I figure it should work in real life too."

Leviathan had to pause for a moment there and once it registered in his head he gave Squigly a look of concern. "TV? Wait... So everything you taught her-?"

"Were from TV shows and movies I watched since waking up. Yes. Why?"

Leviathan was speechless and had no counter. He could only think of how misguided Filia had become now that she spent hours under Squigly's inexperienced wing. The serpent was beginning to realize he put too much blind faith into his host.

Butterscotch, who was sitting by Squigly's feet, looked up to her and gave a confused and soft bark.

Outside of Beefy Royalty
5:09pm

"Ok." Filia smacked her cheeks with her hands to energize herself before going in to meet with her friend. "Remember to use eye contact, stand up straight and be front with your questions. No point in being nervous because he's just a friend. Right, Samson?"

"Can we just get this over with?"

"Mmm! You're no help. Ok... Lesson number 50: Claim it. Heh. I got this, I got this date in the bag. I'm claiming it. It's a whole new year, I'm focused. Nothing's gonna take my joy. All I gotta do is say 'Hey, Player! It's valentine's day so why not hang out together since we both don't have anything to do?', yeah, that's it. Then he'll say-"

"Hey, Filia." The Player said while standing behind her.
"AAHH!" She screamed and turned around, facing him with her hands over her mouth after her outburst. "O-Oh! Heh... Hey! I, uh, I didn't see you there...I wasn't expecting this. What are you doing in a place like this?"

He held up a bag of garbage. "Um, I work here." He laughed a bit, revealing she was standing in the side alleyway leading to the restaurants dumpsters. "I was just coming to throw out the last bit of garbage before heading home."

"O-O-Of course! I knew that. You work here. Yes, who doesn't know that? Amiright?"

"Uuum. A lot of people, actually."

She freezes up with a nervous smile and was on the verge of shaking. She grabbed onto her skirt and clenches the fabric tightly, she was started to lose her nerve. "R-Yea- Uuuuh..."

"This is so cringe worthy, kid..." Samson whispered.

"Shut up!" She tried whispering back through her teeth.

The Player took the garbage over to the dumpster while Filia was having this moment to herself. Once he came back he placed his hand on top of her head. "Samson still being a jerk?"

"Don't get me started..." The parasite spoke out from under the hat.

The Player chuckled and removed his hand. "Filia doesn't even need to tell me that. So what are you guys doing here? I'm done work so."

Filia bit her lower lip and was finding it difficult to make eye contact. 'Come on, Filia! You spent hours preparing for this! How can you choke now?! Stop being weird and just woman up! Do you even have the guts for this?! Do you deserve happiness?! If so then you'd stop messing around and seize what you want! She scolded herself in drill instructor-esque fashion. She inhaled and exhaled, now looking to her friend. "Look, Player, I-"

And this was interrupted by Feng who walked out of the building and noticed he was still around. "Oh, hey." She greeted him casually which got his attention. "I thought you would've been gone by now." She said while resting her elbow on his shoulder.

Seeing Feng's interaction with the Player made a black shadow cast upon Filia's eyes, a dark aura also instantly surrounded her, emitting a shadowy mist to really give off a devilish presence. She stood in silence now being forced to witness their banter.

"What's up, Feng. Nah. I was on my way but then I saw Filia."

Feng then noticed her, bopping her own head for just not noticing her. "How did I not see you? Sorry. I can very ditsy sometimes. It's nice to see you again, Filia. It was fun having that snowball fight with you." She held out her hand for a shake since they never had a proper exchange for that friendly match.

"Mhm." Filia slowly reached out her hand and grasped Feng. The grip was noticeably tight and she shook aggressively while keeping a provoked smirk. "Good times, good times."

Feng noticed the amount of force Filia was applying and tried pulling her hand away but the schoolgirl wasn't having it... Feng tried playing it off with a laugh but it was increasingly becoming worse.
"Heh...I-Indeed. Um, your grip is a little tight."

Filia closed her eyes and kept smiling until the sound of bone succumbing to the force graced her ears. "Oh! Forgive me."

"YOUCH!" The young Dagonian tried to forcibly pry her hand out of her grasp but it proved to be quite the fight until Filia eventually gave mercy and released her. "Jeez! ...That's...that's some arm you got there, little lady."

"You alright?" The Player asked Feng.

Feng flagged her sore hand as if to shake it off. "Yeah. Yeah, I'll be fine. ShEEEESH. So, what are you going to do now? You got a date tonight?" She asked the Player.

"A date? Nope. I was planning on relaxing at home."

"Hmmm?" Feng inched closer to him with a doubtful eye. "You act cool but you can't lie to me." She teased with a coy smile.

More flirting? Filia wasn't sure how to tackle this but things were getting too close for comfort. She's come this far so she had to do something. She found herself freezing up again.

"No. I'm serious." He answered. "Valentine's day wasn't on my priority list sooo... yeah. I'm gonna go home and do nothing."

Feng put her hands on her hips now that she saw he wasn't lying. She then got an idea. "Really? Well, you could always-"

Before it was too late Filia jumps in front of Feng with her hands held up. "Let's spend Valentine's day together!" She shouted in front of the Player.

"Huh?" He asked rather flatly at the sudden suggestion.

"Since we're both not doing anything, and I really enjoy the idea of Valentine's day, I thought I would ask if you'd like to spend the evening with me!"

She was speaking way too fast for him to grasp everything she said but he seemed to get the basic gist of what she was offering. The Player thought about it and he casually shrugged, displaying the complete opposite of her overly shy and nervous persona, even now Filia was looking at him with comically swollen eyes glimmering with hope and cheeks with an even brighter shade of red.

"Uuuuh, sure. I don't mind." He casually responds with his hands tucked into his pockets.

The answer was so straightforward and wasn't expected at all. Filia blinked twice and gave a cute "E=Eh?" and nothing more.

"Yeah. If it's something you really want to do then I don't have any objections to it. I didn't have any plans for today but, since you asked, I do now."

Feng looks at him and then back to Filia, smiling happily to see how close they were as friends, a vibe she got just from looking at them.

"Oh..." The blush on her cheeks faded and the worry she once carried on her shoulders was completely lifted. "Heh. Well...this is embarrassing. Based on how you were talking earlier I thought you hated Valentine's day. I was almost certain you were going to say no."
She was met with a gentle boop to the forehead from the back of his hand. "What I tell you about assuming?"

Filia flinches from the boop but once it was done she leans forward with a rebellious stomp. "Don't boop me!"

He does it again. "I will once you start listening."

She covers her forehead and takes a step back to keep him from doing it again. "Quit it!" She wouldn't admit she actually didn't mind it whatsoever thanks to the embarrassment.

"Heh. Looks you beat me to it, Filia." Feng says.

Filia turns to Feng with a bit of a lost look on her face. "I beat you? To what?"

"I was just about to suggest to the numbskull over here that he should take you out as his valentine's date."

"You were?"

"Mhm. He's always talking about you on our breaks so I was going to bug him about it until he agreed." She then nudged Filia's arm with her elbow. "We gotta lookout for each other, right?"

Filia thought Feng was going to ask HIM out which resulted in her rather hostile approach but now she knows he talks about her to others. She stood there and looked at Feng before cracking a smile which transitioned into a giggle. The Player wasn't too pleased with how Feng was making him sound so he grabs her by the shoulders and moves her along.

"Don't you have a date you need to be getting to?" He asked, slightly irked at her words.

Feng was resisting against him for a little while, acting sly, but she begins to walk along which prompts the Player to stop. Feng turned around and faced him. "You're right. I do. Try not to be a cheapskate for your date, ok?"

The Player held his leg back and throws it forward, kicking the sole of his shoes along the ground making it appear that he wanted to kick her. Feng slightly flinches at him but laughs knowing she had her fun, she waves at the two and wished them a happy valentines day.

"That girl, I swear..." He sighs.

Filia leans in on the side of him with her hands behind her back. "You talk about me when you're at work?" She asked curiously, wanting to know more about this little info Feng leaked.

He looks over to her for a brief moment and then off in the other direction. "What? I just talk about how you worry me. You know how to get us into trouble sometimes."

"And you know how to get us out." She replies with a bright smile.

"Just don't think too much of it. Feng likes to tease."

"Well, I think its sweet."

A long groan could be heard coming from under Filia's hat which initially caught them both off guard but it didn't take the two long to know who it was stemming from. "You're killing me..." Samson complained.
"There he goes again." The Player says. "No point in just wasting away around here, right? Want to get something to eat?"

As if he needed to ask, Filia nods happily. "I'd like that."

"I knew you would, love handles." He teased her by scratching at her side using his fingertips. He proceeded ahead with a grin.

Filia jumps and blushes intensely from this, covering his sides with her arms and giving him a menacing stare. "Yooooo! What did I say about that? I told you I'd choke you again, didn't I?!" She began to run after him.

"Oh crap!" Seeing her light a fire under her feet made the Player dart off further into the city.

Filia chased him throughout the crowds but ultimately they were having fun, there wasn't any real hostility and she wouldn't actually headlock choke him...or at least not in public. The Player had actually forgot how fast she could be when she put the effort into it. Once she caught him she merely attacked him with a flurry of 'girly' punches that was deliberately meant to bring no harm. The Player tried getting her to stop but she was being so persistent, the one thing they shared in this instant were smiles and laughter.

Due to budget reasons there wasn't much they could do in terms of food, so instead of settling on a big restaurant they both agreed on something simple, Filia's suggestion being something quick from one of the many food vendors posted throughout the city, they settle on hotdogs, onion rings, fries, chips and bottled juice. They sat down together and ate on the side of a beautifully sculpted fountain. While they continued conversing Samson was partaking in their time together by messing with the Player, using his extendable tendrils to tap his shoulder on the far end to make him think someone was trying to get his attention so that once he was distracted he'd eat his food which he would be shocked to find was missing. He did a good job making sure he wasn't spotted by the surrounding citizens either, he somehow managed this with the hat on his face.

When they had their fill they went out for a casual stroll to see what would catch their interest. They would eventually discover an outdoor ice skating rink and it was still winter after all so why not enjoy while it was still in the season? The two rent a pair of blades and took to the ice...though they were both pretty bad at actually doing it, demonstrating their amateur skills by just barely keeping their balance and making hard spills whenever they tried picking up speed to actually get somewhere. They were missing the entire point of this specific form of ice skating, which relied on teamwork, it wouldn't be until they got help from a young couple that they understood if they couldn't do it alone then rely on each other to get it done. Hand in hand the two try again but were still demonstrating a novice performance, but, unlike before, they didn't make any drops, shaky but progressive. They skated along the outer line so they could use the wall bounds for support if needed.

A bit of physical exercise, bruises and all, seemed to do them good as they left the rink in laughs, laughing at each other for doing such a bad job maintaining basic control over their own balance. While still being at the heart of the city it wouldn't have been long until the two came across one of the cities well-known movie theaters, aside from a few comedies and action movies a new horror movie was out and the Player suggested they see it despite Filia's hesitation, but after convincing her of all the horrors they've already encountered, mostly Double, what could a movie possibly do to phase them? Well, once they purchased their tickets and got inside the Player was cowering and relying on Filia for support who was only turning away during the jump scares. She had to find a way to balance their popcorn and keep him steady whenever he was being all scaredy. Because of him the other viewers were under the impression Filia thought the movie was a comedy.
The movie was enough to keep them distracted long enough to not even realize how late it was in the day, it wouldn't be until they got outside they find that night had fallen, it was around 9pm so it was a good time to start heading home. If the Player didn't have to work they could've spent most of their day enjoying each other's company. Along the way they come across 'Meridian Florist', a beautiful flower shop that graciously extended hours for the sake of valentine's day but the owner was now closing shop, luckily she was willing allow him to be the last customer of the day. The Player was able to purchase a dazzling rose, the name tag reads 'Madame Caroline Testout', and cost him about 25 bones. He didn't know anything about the rose other than it looked nice, it was pink lace in color and was actually one of the rarest flowering plants in Canopy, which explained its price for a single purchase. He gives Filia the rose and she nearly loses her mind, the very thought of receiving such a thoughtful gift made her heart sing. Her only regret was not being able to get him anything but he assures he didn't need anything from her.

As they continued through New Meridian Filia was now walking with her arm latched around his with her head resting near his shoulder. Funny enough she hadn't even realized she was that close and based on the Player's reaction he didn't mind. They took multiple detours, using any and everything to distract them from getting home any sooner, not that it mattered it felt like time was at a complete stand still for them, but even so walking for so long took its toll on them and they sit together on a bench by the Meridian River. The waters surface beautifully reflected lights of the neon lit city, the calm night air helped ompliment this moment of calm.

Filia was barely able to take her eyes off her rose, just holding it filled her with so many joyful emotions that she would be sure to cherish for years to come.

"Hey." She breaks the silence and turns to him.

"Yeah?" The Player responds while still looking out to the river.

"I really want to thank you."

"Thank me?" He looks over to her looking puzzled. "What for?"

"For today. You really didn't have to spend it with me but you did. I'm just really grateful."

"Pfft. Nah, you don't have to thank me, but I get where you're coming from so you're welcome. I had a really good time myself."

Filia smiles at him with the most precious face, seeing her like that made him look away to save himself a heart attack. "I'm glad." She says with enough bubbly joy to make any man weak.

"Yeah. Yeah... Same here." He kept trying to resist the urge to face her, the Player didn't want to lose his 'cool' image. "We should probably start heading back. Squigly might be getting worried."

She found it strange he wouldn't look at her but she was no fool, she could tell he was being a little bashful. Filia takes another look at her rose and closed her eyes. She slowly leans over and rests her head on his shoulder, losing herself in the moment.

"Just a little longer." She says gently.

The Player looks down to Filia and sees her resting. It was already late but he couldn't deny her request, he gives his answer by remaining silent and leaning back against the bench.

His eyes were left to wander and he began tapping his fingers against his knee, he was clearly being a bit anxious about something. In his head he was debating with whether or not he should rest against Filia. Would it be in bad taste? Would he be displaying too much affection? Would she even
mind? Or maybe this was just a case of shyness.

The Player couldn't take not taking action, it was a few more minutes until 12am and if he wanted to be romantic now had to be the time. 'Screw it!' He thought to himself. He eased his head down to her and rests his cheek against the top of her head.

Filia's eyes widened after she felt him and looks over without too much movement to realize this was real. He was actually laying against her and being affectionate, well, more than usual anyway. Her cheeks were met with a familiar blush and she closed her eyes, nuzzling into him as he for comfortable. The two friends sat under the watchful eye of the beautiful starry sky and embraced one another, further strengthening their companionship.

...That is until Samson got uncomfortable. He used his tendrils to push the Players head off of him, forcing him to sit up straight.

"Aye, get the hell off me! Your big head is making it cramped in here and it doesn't feel good having all that weight being on me when I'm trying to get some sleep!"

"Right, sorry." The Player actually completely forgot about Samson and accepted failure in his attempt at trying romance during the last few minutes of the day.

A/N: I did a Halloween and Christmas special so you knew a Valentine's special was inbound, the only thing I didn't do was a New Year special but that was because I wasn't around to getting it done and when I was we were already well into the New Year, I like to try and get special chapters out the day they're meant to happen, like Christmas on Christmas, Halloween on Halloween and so on. I'm posting this a day early because I don't think I'm going to be around on the 14th so it's better to have it out now rather than being days late.

So a chapter focused on shipping, I wanted to test the waters to see how I'd do with it and as I wrote I felt I was doing a sloppy job but without fault there's no improvement, right? So if I did butcher it a little I like to think it went toward making me better IF I decide to tackle it again. Now originally I was going to have this chapter be split into two verses: Verse A with Filia and Verse B with Squigly, they would've been two unique stories that ends with a valentines date, I was going for this because there has been requests for this kind of thing, where multiple story pathways are open to allow for more flexible character interaction, and as I love my readers and reviewers I thought I'd try it BUT because there's only a few more days until valentine's day I had to scrap the idea and get one out, so I used Filia since she has the most established friendship with the Player. As of now. She just made the most sense to me, Cerebella isn't into anybody who isn't Vitale(From what we can gather), Parasoul is far too busy being a leader, Valentine isn't into dating and is asexual(plus she's currently MIA), Marie is the Skullgirl, Painwheel isn't around at the moment, Nadia doesn't seem like the type who would go for it(or perhaps this is just how I feel toward comic relief characters where they aren't really suited for romance) and Squigly, while she has chemistry, I feel like she wouldn't go for it either because she sees how close Filia is to him right now and wouldn't want to interfere in that. Not only that you guys know how I feel about harems and I can't get into having every girl fawn over the Player. Again, I'm surprised how many of you suggested a harem, that genuinely surprised me.

Y'know, I think a big contribution to this chapter was the new song for Kingdom Hearts III by Utada Hikaru, "Don't Think Twice" and "Oath" came around and I was just enthralled
by what she has given us, hell I'd say its the theme for this chapter too, even though the song itself isn't complete lol. I am so hype for Kingdom Hearts you don't even know. It's actually one of the biggest inspirations I got, Sora being one of the inspirations for the Player, what with how he fits into the Disney worlds and their abridged re-telling of the movies story. If you haven't heard the song(s) yet I suggest you go check them out because it's heavenly on the ears but after coming off Simple and Clean/Sanctuary I'm not sure how it'll hold up, I'll need to hear the full thing to come to my conclusion but I'm rambling.

One more thing! When a chapter is missing a proper chapter title like; Chapter 999: Blahblahblah that means it's a standalone experience and doesn't advance the plot so it may never be referenced aka non-canon or filler, but knowing how much sense I don't make I may end up contradicting myself later down the line, to this day I still don't know if I want that Halloween chapter to count or not, it hasn't been referenced by any of the characters outside of Squigly in the omake and the omakes are super non-canon lol. Like Marie said to Robo-Fortune in the game "Oh, please. Nobody will think of this nonsense as canon."
Squigly stands within a void of cold darkness with only a single spotlight being her source of light. As she looks around the abyss she felt a familiar lump in her throat which made her heart race, a drop of sweat was seen on the side of her face as she clenched her hand against her chest.

Suddenly a vision of calm reveals an all too familiar scene: the sight of an aristocratic party in progress with hundreds of esteemed guests.

"…No." Squigly mutters softly. She could feel a bit of anxiety building up within her.

The vision played out like an early 1940's film with black and white picture and vintage audio effect. A group of five newcomers, all women, enter the party and were heavily armed — the one leading the group had a mounted shotgun for an arm, her identity was left a mystery thanks to the all-black face veil which seemed to only show her left eye and mouth, the latter of which was a sadistic smile.

"Happy birthday, Selene." The armed woman took a sip of champagne before pointed her gun out to an unknown target. "Time to blow out your candles."

Without warning Squigly was unable to move or take action, this sudden form of paralysis even prevented her from closing her eye to spare herself the horrors of this reoccurring nightmare. A tear formed in her eye as she shook in absolute horror as the sound of gunshots and screams filled the void.

Soon after the massacre Squigly was met with another vision that tormented her, it was the sight of herself being at the mercy of the woman, pointing her shotgun to her head while her mother, Selene Contiello, was forced to watch in unfathomable terror and sorrow by the four other women who restrained her.

"Don't forget to make a wish."

The woman provided one last taunt to the grieving mother who pleaded desperately to spare her child only to receive a smirk before a loud gunshot goes off.

Squigly's own blood splatters across her face and she was left shaking uncontrollably with only tears pouring out of her eye as she witnessed her own death. "No… No. No! NO!" She repeats over and over not wanting to witness any more.

In her waking she rises in a panic, sweating and gasping for air only to find she was safe in bed. She looks to the side and sees Filia sleeping soundly, causing her to breath calmly but the trauma was still there. She looks down to the covers and sighs in a haze of stress.

"Squigly…?" Leviathan reveals himself awake, curling around so that he was looking at her. "Are you alright?"

"…I'm fine, Leviathan. Sorry. I hope I didn't startle you."

"You're sweating. Did you have that dream again?"

She didn't answer at first, just thinking about it made her want to vomit, but after a while she closed her eye and simply nods. She pulls the blankets from over her and she slowly makes her way for the bathroom just outside their bedroom door.
Squigly washes her face with a wet rag to get the sweat off of her forehead but once she was done she was left to see how exhausted she appeared within the mirror, her already black lower eyelids were beginning to see bags take form.

She touches the underside of her eyes and sighs. "That woman… The Medici's…"

"...I know it's hard but you shouldn't let the past consume you." Leviathan tries to consult her but even he knew this was easier said than done, but it didn't stop him from trying. He carried too much to see Squigly in this state.

"I know, and I try to get better...but I want to know why. I hate not knowing, Leviathan. Why did they kill my family? What did we ever do?"

Every day was a struggle despite how she appeared. Squigly endured months of emotional trauma but kept it hidden from the Player and Filia to keep them from worrying about her, she endures the memories seeded into her brain and in turn sprouts the tree of hatred, she was only human after all, or at least the remnant of one. She was becoming increasingly angry, bitter and even spiteful, wanting nothing more than to see the Medici's meet their end and knowing there were still some out there just made her all the more anxious.

Leviathan could sense her emotions and knew there wasn't much that could be done unless the Medici's were stopped once and for all. "We'll find the answers. I know we will, and besides we're not alone. You've made many allies since awakening and we're all after the same thing."

"Yeah. I guess."

She didn't seem too thrilled despite Leviathan's words of encouragement. She takes a deep breath and exhales calmly, Squigly was aware of her mood and knew Leviathan was just concerned so she pets the side of his face to show that she didn't hold any hostility toward her parasite, even smiling to bring home the point that she was back to her normal self.

After Leviathan nuzzles into her cheek supportively Squigly leaves the bathroom, turning off the light and returning to bed. She had a big day waiting for her later on so it was best to try and rest up, the dream usually never strikes twice.

Training Field
February 17th, 10:33am

Following a rocky night it was the start of a new day and the first training session Squigly shared with her friends now that the Player had finally eased up and allowed her to join himself and Filia, however it probably wasn't going to be ideal with dark clouds looming overhead and the smell of rain filling the air.

Filia was wrapping her right hand in athletic tape, covering her wrist down to her palm, this was necessary for her special training, training which involved being armed in combat. She had a pair of weapons that were sword-like in appearance but the general shape was comparable to that of a hairpin, specifically a bobby pin, the grip was apparently designed to serve as the blades guard as well, taking the form of a bobby pin ridge.

The Player examined her new weapons and was intrigued by their design, he didn't even know she had swords. "How long did you have these?" He asked while holding one in hand.

"Not long. Just a few days. They were a gift from Samson."
"A gift?" The Player questioned with a look of uncertainty.

Even Samson wasn't sure why Filia called them that, in fact he felt slightly offended she would address them as such. "I never gifted you anything. I gave you those swords to get you more combat experience, fisticuffs won't always be the ideal solution to a fight."

"Oh. I see." Filia nods in understanding and flexed her hand to make sure the tape was comfortable enough for her.

"He does raise a good point." The Player added. "It wouldn't hurt to learn more ways to fight. Have you ever used a sword, Filia?"

"Nope."

Samson huffs and crossed his arms. "That's why I'm going to teach you. You may not be Delilah but we'll get somewhere."

"Delilah?" Both the Player and Filia questioned simultaneously.

That name had actually unintentionally blurted out and Samson smacked his teeth after realizing what he had just done.

"Who's that?" The Player asked.

"None of your business." The parasite claimed before snatching the sword away from the Player. "Now, Filia. Since you don't have any experience with weapons I'm going to have to teach you the basics."

"Right! This is going to be so much fun!"

Now that it was pretty much established that Samson was to be Filia's mentor today Heart-Syncing was out of the question, or at least just for her, but the Player already had more than enough experience bonding with Filia to ensure a basic understanding and stable connection.

Squigly was sitting by the nearby creak, minding her own by watching the water pass downstream with Leviathan. It wouldn't be until she heard the grass crunching did she finally look elsewhere, in this case just over her shoulder.

"Hey," The Player spoke down to her with a smile "whatcha doing over here by yourself?"

"…Huh? Oh. Nothing." Squigly tried to smile back but was only able to produce a half-hearted effort.

It was pretty clear that wasn't all genuine causing the Player to briefly make a straight face, but he didn't let it distract him and he smiles again. "Well, it's your first day of training and Filia doesn't need me so you want to give Heart-Syncing a shot?"

"I'd like that." She nods before looking over to Leviathan. "You up for this, Lev?"

"How could I possibly resist? We've only been looking forward to this for months."

Leviathan was clearly showing more enthusiasm than his host, most likely hoping to brighten her mood which had been lacking the past few days.

Getting her answer Squigly stands and grins with her eye closed at the Player. "There you have it. So, how do we begin?"
"Since it's your first time it may be a little tricky, but I think we'll get the hang of it before the day is done. We're pretty good friends after all so the bonding aspect of it should make it a little easier." He inhales and calmly exhales, closing his eyes and preparing the link. "First clear your mind. Both of you."

This was a technique the duo were more than familiar with, they were very well disciplined and had no issues finding their tranquil state of mind, the Player focused on their presence and was able to detect them within seconds, the beginning process was complete — their bodies transcend to a spiritual space where their souls meet for the first time.

The spectral forms of the two are engulfed in a magenta aura, Squigly's signature color, and they begin to sync, but midway through the process there was a disturbance in the physical plane.

The Player opened one eye to find that a drop of water struck his head, he held out his hand and a few more drops hit his palm. "Rain? Now?" He questioned in disappoint.

Unable to sense her friend Squigly came around as well. "What happened?" She asked before feeling the rain fall upon her. She looks up to the sky and finally notices the dark clouds.

"Geez. Just when we were getting things rolling… That's unfortunate."

Filia runs over to the two with her hands over her head to protect Samson. "I told you it was going to rain." She was directing her comment to the Player.

"Oh hush. What are you a psychic?" He remarks.

"No. I watch the forecast like a normal person."

"Well how was I supposed to know it was going to rain so early?"

"By watching the forecast!"

"Who are YOU raising your voice at?!"

Filia placed her hands on her hips and leans forward. "YOU!" She said in a stern voice.

"Oh yeah?!" He meets her halfway and leans in to challenge her.

"Yeah!" She exclaims.

The two were head-to-head and stared each other down with rivaling eyes that pierced one another. This would only last for a second before they both crack and break into a quick snicker which then turned to laughter, showing that their exchange was a friendly one.

"You two are going to make me hurl." Samson intervened by pushing the Player's head away from Filia's, or rather himself since his forehead was against Filia's bangs.

"You wouldn't feel sickly if you actually had friends, Samson." The Player remarked as he rubbed his forehead from Samson's tight grip and rather forceful shove.

"Maybe we can save the fighting for later?" Squigly suggested dully. "Let's return home and get out of this rain."

"We don't have to go, Sienna. What's a little rain going to hurt? I can run back to the apartment and grab our rain gear."
She shakes her head negatively and looks at her friends. "I'm actually not feeling it. I think I'd just like to stay in for today."

This was a surprise, especially coming from her since she was always so enthusiastic at the very idea of being able to train with her allies.

"You sure?" Filia asked.

"Yes. I'd just like to--" Suddenly Squigly's eye caught sight of a familiar figure in the distance, just beyond her friends.

Standing among the dense trees was a woman dressed in a stylish thigh-high slit dress and a black face veil that concealed her true identity. Leviathan didn't seem to notice as his attention was on Squigly who had frozen up.

"Squigly?" The serpent parasite called her name to snap her out of this absent state of mind but no response.

The young Contiello couldn't tell if she was seeing correctly but the figure lingered as if saying it were real. Filia waves her hand in front of her face in an attempt to get her attention.

"Hey, Squigly?" Filia called out. "...Squigly!" She then raised her voice slightly.

Hearing Filia's voice made her flinch, but she was back. "Huh?"

"You feeling alright?" The Player asked, clearly concerned, he placed his hand on her forehead to see if she had a fever. "You're not acting like yourself, Sienna. Are you sick? You should've told us so before we came out."

She shook her head so that his hand was no longer touching her. "No. I'm fine, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to. I just got distracted." She looks back in the direction she saw the woman and realized she was no longer there. "...We should get out of this rain though. I'll make us a hot meal once we're inside. How's that sound?"

"Now you're talking!" Samson was the most excited about this news as he threw his tendrils into the air, clearly he was fond of Squigly's cooking.

Filia smiles believing Squigly was back to normal but had to mind Samson's excitement. "Samson, you ate breakfast not too long ago. How can you still be hungry for more?"

"How can I NOT be hungry for more is the question. I'm a parasite, I need to eat. One measly plate isn't going to satisfy my hunger."

"You ate most of mine though..." She said in saddened tone. Just then her stomach began to growl causing her to cradle her empty belly. "I got the stomach to prove it."

Filia and Samson began to exchange various debates as they walk along, making way for the city, the Player followed them from a distance to prevent getting into Samson's shennaigans.

Squigly inhaled to calm her nerves and began to follow after her friends but as the rain increased she felt a disturbance in the air forcing her to stop. She turns around and to her shock the woman she thought she saw reappeared, once again framing herself amongst the trees.

"Squigly?" Leviathan called her name curiously to see what was wrong.
Seeing the woman before her filled Squigly with many emotions, none of them positive. After being
tormented in her sleep for years she finally had what caused her so much grief standing before her.
She clenched her fist and was shaking with anger, the rage boiling inside her heart as the memories
of that horrid day replayed in her mind.

"You…" She muttered spitefully.

Once she realized Squigly had her attention the woman slowly backed away before making a run for
the nearby forest area. Seeing her flee seemed to have struck a hidden nerve as Squigly ended up
biting her lower lip to the point of injury.

Refusing to let her escape Squigly chases after her into the forest area.

"Squigly? Where are you going?" Leviathan asked.

"She's back."

Her comment struck Leviathan curious, it was so vague there was nothing for him to work on. "She's
back? Who?" He questioned.

Squigly closed her eye and grit her teeth, trying her best to fight off the memories that haunt her.
"That woman… That woman! The one who took everything away!"

Before Leviathan could question her again they reach a clearing and waiting for them was the very
soul Squigly was after. She stood tall with her white aristocratic cloak covering the right portion of
her body. Squigly comes to a halt and finally meets her face to face.

Now Leviathan was able to see for his own eyes. It was here that everything his host had said made
sense, he was beginning to recall his days as Roberto Contiello's parasite. "You're…" Flashes of her
face appeared in the form of memories which help paint the hazy picture of that tragic night for
Leviathan. ".…Black Dahlia." He revealed her name with eyes widened in shock.

"So it's true." Black Dahlia finally broke her own silence. "There is one last remaining Contiello.
Can't believe I missed one." She gets a closer look at Squigly's appearance and looking at her she
could see that there was something off about her state of being. "No, that's not it, is it? You've just
been temporarily resurrected."

Dahlia's smile only fueled Squigly's anger, the ferociousness on her face spoke volumes for her
current state of mind. "You monster…I'm going to make you pay for what you've done! Do you hear
me?!"

"Save your energy, child. I'm not going anywhere until I finish you off. I won't kill you, or at least…
not so fast. I'm going to take my time and enjoy watching you suffer just as I've done with your
mother."

That was Squigly's breaking point, unable to keep her emotions under control she lashes out at Black
Dahlia with a furious shout. Seeing Squigly in such a state only brought entertainment from the older
woman who throws her cloak back to reveal the shotgun appendage she used to massacre her family
and end Squigly's life.

Squigly throws a straight punch but Dahlia blocks her attack by grabbing her fist and raises her up as
if it were nothing. With Squigly in her grasp she wastes no time and attacks, by releasing her and
using a reverse roundhouse kick that was quick enough to strike before Squigly's feet could even
touch the ground.
The power behind the attack sent Squigly sliding across the wet ground. After coming to a stop she picks herself up only to collapse to her knees after an immense pain from her ribcage reminded her she suffered a powerful strike. Regardless of what was dealt Squigly remained angry, looking to where she last saw Dahlia only to discover she was nowhere to be found.

Suddenly she was struck from behind and was now lying face down in the grass and dirt with Dahlia's heel planted firmly against her head as the weight keeping her down.

"The dirt suites the Contiello name so well." She mocked the emotional fighter.

Squigly grits her teeth and tries pulling herself up but the more she struggled the more her side ached preventing her from using all her strength. "SHUT UP!" She demands.

Leviathan quickly retaliates to cover his host by unleashing his powerful dragon breath at Dahlia who jumps out of the way at the last second.

The magnificent flame is fired into the air and brings light to the dark forest area for only a moment, thankfully it also served as a beacon for the Player and Filia who were close enough to spot it, the duo rush in the direction they last saw the fire.

Back at the clearing Squigly picks herself up and faces her opponent. Although Leviathan shared Squigly's anger and frustration he was the most level headed of the two and didn't want his host to make any poor decisions.

"Squigly, don't let her deter you. We must keep our focus."

"I know, Leviathan!" Her elevated tone contradicted her response of understanding.

Black Dahlia kept her smile and just as she took a step toward Squigly the Player and Filia arrive. "Squigly!" Filia called out making Dahlia look over her shoulder for a second before lightning flashed and she disappeared from sight shocking Squigly and Leviathan.

Filia runs out into the clearing to check on her friends. "Squigly, Leviathan, are you ok?!" She was clearly worried and the first to pick up on the fact that her face was covered in mud.

"...I'm fine, but where did that woman go?" Squigly was hardly paying the arrival of her friends any mind, checking her surroundings for any sight of Dahlia.

"What woman?" Filia asked.

Squigly turns to Filia with a puzzled glance. "What do you mean? The woman who was standing right there."

The Player approached and heard what was going on, he returned a similar perplexed look. He directs his attention out to their surroundings and there was nothing. "There was nobody here. It was just you laying on the ground."

"N-No." Squigly shook her head in disbelief and turned in the other direction. "That's impossible. You were right behind her before she disappeared."

Filia looks to the Player and he looks back at her, neither of them knew what Squigly was talking about because, for them, nobody was there. They turn back to her but with looks of doubt.

"Sienna, are you ok?" The Player asked. "Not that I'm doubting you, but you did just run off without saying anything. Then Leviathan lights up the sky with fire and when we get here you're covered in
Before she could respond she wraps left arm around her midsection to clutch her ribcage in hand, she collapses to the ground and grunts in pain — Leviathan, being her parasite, felt the injury and groans himself.

Filia crouches down and placed her hands on Squigly's shoulders to see what was wrong. "Squigly?! Oh no, are you hurt?"

"…Nngh. I'm fine I just- Augh!"

Seeing her display so much pain was proof that something was wrong. Squigly claims there was someone there but if the Player and Filia weren't able to see them then what exactly could it have been? It didn't make any sense for any of them.

The Player takes Squigly into his arms, being extra careful as he held her in a bridal fashion. "Let's get you out of this rain. Filia, let's go."

"Y-Yeah…"

The group rush back to the city, leaving the area before Squigly's condition could get any worse. As they depart lightning flashed and the figure of a woman took shape in full, appearing in the clearing where they once stood Black Dahlia reappeared with that same untouched smile as the rain began to pick up.

Once the trio return home the Player and Filia quickly tend to Squigly by getting her out of wet clothes and into some comfortable pajamas, though the whole undressing bit was done by Filia so the Player couldn't see her naked. Once it was clear for him to enter the girls room he brings the medical supplies — Squigly pulls up her shirt to reveal her bruised side, the power behind the back of Dahlia's heel was no joke.

The Player applies an astringent compound to help with the pain since massaging the area would've done no good. "Filia, can you get me some ice?" He requested.

"Of course." She says before leaving the room in a hurry.

The Player tossed the cotton ball he used in the girls trash bin and returns to the bedside where Squigly sat, he reopened the med kit and got the elastic bandage to help with the swelling. Filia returned with ice securely placed in a plastic bag and handed it to the Player.

"So, Sienna, what exactly happened?" The Player asked as he wrapped the bandage around her torso.

"…I-" She stopped herself short and took a moment to think it over, this was a piece of her past she was dealing with, and one she wasn't sure if she was ready to share. "…I, uh."

"Yes?" He prompted her to answer.

She didn't respond and regretfully turns her head away from her friends. Surprised by her actions the Player gives her a conflicting side glance, even Filia was visibly taken by Squigly's choice.

Leviathan hangs his head in shame but kept loyal to his host, choosing to speak for her. "The wounds haven't healed yet." He says.
"I'm sorry." Squigly gave a heartfelt apology before facing her companions. "I just…can't. I can't share this with you, not now."

Filia takes a step forward. "But, Squigly, we-" She was interrupted by the Player who held out his arm in front of her.

The Player could see the emotional weight of the topic just by looking at Squigly's face. If things were too complicated for her to explain then he chose to respect that, as her friends he knew it was best for them to give her time. He looks back to Filia and shakes his head, denying her attempt to pry on the matter further.

Filia, though hesitant, understood but looks away from her friends, it was hard to accept knowing something was wrong.

"We understand, Sienna." The Player faces her again and placed his hand on her shoulder while looking her in the eye. "You've had a lot on your mind lately so we understand if you just need time to rest. Your bruise should heal up just fine so all you need to do is rest and keep this on it." He hands her the ice bag.

Squigly takes the ice and holds it in her hand, she looks down to it, silent, but then looks at the Player with a smile. "Thank you. Both of you." She looks over to Filia to show that she was also addressing her. "I'm lucky to have such wonderful friends."

The Player returns the gesture by showing her a bright and supportive grin. "Well, you should rest. Filia and I will be downstairs if you guys need us." He looks over to Filia. "Right?"

Filia gives him an unreadable look, rubbing her forearm and showing a bit of uncertainty. It was obvious to both the Player and Squigly that Filia didn't like this, she just wasn't feeling the lack of conversation, if anything it felt like a little betrayal considering whatever attacked her left a bruise, and after the duo fought Double why would this cause need for secrets? It didn't make sense to Filia.

Rather than answering with words Filia just nods her head in defeat, she couldn't find it in herself to smile because she wasn't okay with this group choice. She leaves the room and heads downstairs.

Seeing Filia like that was painful for Squigly, but she had her reasons and endured it. The Player looks back to her and the two exchange silence before he takes his leave and closes the door behind himself to give Squigly the peace he felt she needed. Squigly applied the ice to her side and laid down, looking up to the ceiling.

"…This doesn't make sense." Squigly said to Leviathan. "Why would she be here? The Skullgirl ran the Medici's out of the city, they couldn't possibly be trying to work their way back in. Not with Marie still around."

"We mustn't forget the public doesn't know where the Skullgirl is, not since she attacked their tower in the open." Leviathan explained. "Aside from you, myself, Filia, Samson and the Player, the world is left in the dark. Including the Medici's and all who associate with them."

"Then why is that woman, Black Dahlia, here? How does she know I'm alive?"

Leviathan turns his head in disappoint. "…That I don't know." He faced his host in shame. "I apologize, Squigly. I wish I had the answers."

"Don't feel bad. This just means we can get her back for what she's done to us." She clenched the ice pack in her hand, crunching up a few cubes as the idea of vengeance seduced her.
"You shouldn't act rashly, milady. Don't let your anger lead you astray."

"I'm not. I know what I'm doing and I finally have a chance to make this right." She says while looking Leviathan in the face. "I have to do this, Leviathan. I just have to."

This was important to her and Leviathan could see it, there was no possible way for him to decline her this wish but at the same time it seemed dangerous since they didn't know the full extent of what was going on.

Leviathan looks Squigly in the eye and bows his head. "I'm with you." He declares, plain and simple.

The serpent eases his face into Squigly and nuzzles her, providing Squigly the only source of peace and calm since the day started. She smiles into Leviathan's affections and nuzzles back into him, laughing softly in between.

Now that the two had their mission set it was time for rest. Squigly got comfortable in bed and exhaled, emptying her mind so she wouldn't have anything to worry about, with Leviathan curling up beside her she felt secure enough to close her eyes and drift off to sleep.

An unspecified amount of time had passed and Squigly finds herself awakening in black limbo while standing on the surface of a pure white ocean illuminating light. She looks around, lost, and saw nothing but darkness.

Realizing she wouldn't make any progress just standing around she takes a step forward and the water ripples under her foot. She looks down to the ocean and sees a reflection of herself when she was alive, but as she looked down to her hands she still had her left skeletal forearm, so why wasn't she seeing her current reflection?

Squigly directs her attention forward and sees the Player and Filia standing across the way and smiling to show happy they were to see her. Squigly develops a smile and was ready to run into the embrace of her friends, but another figure appeared causing Squigly to freeze in horror — her eye widened in shock and her legs trembled uncontrollably... Black Dahlia was standing behind her friends at gunpoint.

Squigly reaches out her hand to them and her mouth inaudibly flaps, based on her reaction she shouts their names. She placed her hand up to her throat, realizing she lost her voice — the very essence of her entire being and pride as a Contiello, her heart was racing, and in the middle of her questions the sound of a gunshot made her flinch, it was soon followed by another.

The horrified youth knew what it was, but she refused to face it, she could only look down, the white ocean she stood on soon turned red, it was thick and resembled blood.

The moment she realized what she was standing on her legs fell through the ocean, it was as if physics regained control over Squigly. She was waist deep in the ocean and she struggled desperately to fight against it but the more she fought the faster her body sunk...if she didn't want to face the deaths of her friends then she would bathe in their blood. Her torso was slowly consumed and only her head remained, slowly she sunk until her vision turned red.

12:00am

Squigly jumped out of her sleep in a panic, sweat covering her body and her breathing was frantic. She looks around and sees that she was safe in bed but Filia wasn't beside her. She wastes no time
She was able to breathe again, exhaling long and hard with her hand over her heart. "Thank the almighty..." She whispers to herself.

"Squigly?" Leviathan reveals himself to be up as he called her name, looking at her with a worried expression.

She faces him but doesn't say a word, instead she slowly backs into the wall and slowly slides down until she was sitting on the floor, she brings her knees up to her chest and wraps her arms around them so that she could rest her head in her arms.

Unable to take the torture of her dreams anymore Squigly felt it was time to move on, she couldn't keep living like this and had to face her demons. Squigly changes out of her pajama's and returns to her default clothing, that was all she had and all she would need but before doing anything else she got a piece of paper and pen so that she could leave a note on the bed for her friends. Once the note was done Squigly quietly leaves the apartment, taking her key so that she could lock the door.

She stood outside of 309, their suite, and bows to show her respect to her friends since waking them wasn't an option. With this goodbye she turns away and walks to the elevator.

"...So, you're certain you want to do this?" Leviathan asked. It was a better time than never now that they were on their way.

"Yes. I wouldn't be able to live with myself if either of our friends got hurt because I got them involved with my past. This is the road I've chosen and the burden I must bear. Once this is over we'll see them again."

"I see."

"Are you having second thoughts, Leviathan?"

"No, of course not. I will always be supportive of you, I just hope they will understand."

Deep down Squigly did too. In a sense she felt it was rather selfish making this choice on her own but at the same time their safety meant more to her than anything. She initially displayed a rather saddened look, slightly hanging her head, but quickly takes to a more confident approach by looking onward.

"Don't worry. I know they will." She responds.

The Player and Filia would've, that goes without saying, but the emotional damage would still very much be there, especially in the case of Filia who was already against the idea of sweeping the incident from earlier under the rug. Leviathan's undying loyalty would see him support Squigly's choice, no matter the case, this was his choice just as much as hers and he burrows himself back into her skull so that he could remain hidden from the public.

Back in 309 the Player and Filia remain asleep until, about 25 minutes later, Butterscotch had awoken to readjust himself on Filia, the pup got up, circles around on Filia's torso and settles his head back into her bosom. Filia feels Butterscotch moving around and ends up waking up to see the him settling in, she smiles down to him and pets his back gently before realizing how late it was.

"Jeez...I overslept. I need to get Squigly another ice pack."
She gets up from the couch and gently lays the dog on the cushion so that she could make another patch of ice for Squigly's side. Once the pack was ready she makes her way upstairs to the bedroom where, to her shock, finds Squigly wasn't in bed. She drops the ice pack on the floor and takes a few steps back before rushing downstairs.

The Player was snoring away with drool forming a stain on his pillow.

"Wake up!" Filia exclaims in a panic. "Player, wake up!" She quickly runs to the couch's side and pulls the blanket from over him. "Come on! Wake up!"

"Mmm... No, I don't want to eat anymore." He wasn't too bothered by Filia's actions, he was talking in his sleep and proceeded to roll over in the opposite direction with his arms wrapped around himself for warmth.

Filia grabs him and shakes him aggressively. "GET UP!" She raised her voice even more, causing not only the Player to wake up but Samson as well.

"Whoa! What?! I'm up...I'm up...!" He jumped in a drowsy daze.

Samson rubbed the sleep out of his eyes and saw that it was still dark outside. "Hey, what the hell, Filia? The sun isn't even up yet. What gives?"

"Yeah..." The Player had to side with Samson on this one and yawns loudly. "What's wrong? Bad dream?"

"Squigly! I-It's Squigly! She's gone!"

"...Gone? What do you mean gone?"

Filia grabs his hand and pulls him up, dragging the Player along and Butterscotch follows after them until they reached the stairs, he was still too small for climbing. Once the duo got to the room the Player sees that Squigly was indeed gone.

"I came upstairs to get her a new ice pack but when I came in the room she wasn't here."

"...What in the mother of-? Where would she go?"

"I don't know...I didn't even hear the door open downstairs."

The Player goes over to the bed and sees her pajama's neatly folded but beside them was a piece of paper. "What's this?" He asked himself in the middle of unfolding the copy paper. Filia runs to his side to see what he had.

To: Player and Filia

By the time you find this then you've already found out that I'm no longer in the suite. I'm sorry for leaving without saying goodbye but this will have to do for now.

My time with you two has been some of the best of my life, you were able to give me something I thought I had lost years ago, you were able to bring me happiness and joy. Every day I say to myself, "I wish I..."
could stay with you forever" but I know, that in reality, all good things must end at some point or another, no matter how hard we wish for it.

I knew that if I told you the truth then you would've tried to stop me from doing what I had to and I'm sorry for making you worry, but I'll be fine. I have Leviathan by my side and we'll look out for each other. I don't know when I'll return but I promise we'll meet again.

Forgive me

-Squigly

The Player shakes his head, speechless. He couldn't piece together the situation no matter how hard he tried. "This doesn't make any sense." He looks over to Filia with a rather serious face. "Squigly is like one of the coolest girls I know, there's never been a time where she expressed that something was bothering her."

"Are you dense?" Samson had finally spoken up getting the attention of the two humans. "How could you figure she takes everyday with a smile? You think she's constantly in a state of sugar and rainbows? The girl lost her family and was killed before she could even live her life. She's only allowed to live for moments at a time to slay a monster. Do you have any idea how that must feel? That bastard Leviathan...he'd be willing to take that burden to the grave as long as it meant 'keeping her happy', pathetic. I've seen where that road leads and it's not pretty."

Filia gasps at the revelation and looks out to nothing with a blank gaze. "...Oh my goddess. He's right. How could we have been so blind? Squigly has been through hell and back."

"That's an understatement, kid. Her mom was a Skullgirl and she's reminded of it every time she's forced to awaken. Not only that but her families killers are still running around after all this time and it's been over a decade."

The Medici's...the very blood that runs through Filia's veins, knowing this the amnesiac flinches as if taking a blow to the heart. She hangs her head in shame and closes her eyes, she actually began to wonder if Squigly actually hated her despite her kind demeanor. Seeing the state she was in the Player lifts her head by the chin using his index finger, earning her attention and having her eyes meet his.

"We're bringing her home." He says in a serious tone.

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**Canopy Kingdom**

**Contiello Estate, 12:55am**

Squigly and Leviathan's search brought them to the ruins of their old home which was located in an unknown region within the Canopy Kingdom. Everything was in ruin and was apparently abandoned with no maintenance or reconstruction since the massacre that occurred over 14 years ago, Squigly walked among the ruin in silence, careful to watch her feet over the broken glass that was spread throughout the floor.

Everything was familiar to Squigly and every so often a sudden PTSD flashback interferes with her
current state of mind which trips her up and causes her to break out into a mild panic.

The sound of gunshots, screams and the blood and her own death were taunting her with every step she took, Leviathan's concerns grew as she stumbled about while trying to deal with the stress.

"Squigly, maybe we should-

"No. I'm fine." She assures with one hand over her face. "...You don't have to worry about me." She lowers her hand and forces a barely functional smile.

"We shouldn't be here, Squigly. With all due respect I can see you're emotionally unwell just looking at this place."

"...I just had to see it. One last time. I'm sorry for dragging you here but I have to face this if I want to move on. Even after all these years it's hard to accept this...this...I just..."

Those images of Black Dahlia resurfaced and Squigly's anger began to rise. She goes quiet for a second before gritting her teeth and clenching her fist, Leviathan sensed her growing emotions and was ready to council her until-

"It brings back memories doesn't it?" A feminine voice echoed from the shadows, taking the unsuspecting duo by surprise. "Memories of that horrendous day."

Squigly and Leviathan look around the empty space, unable to determine where the voice was coming from. "Dahlia..." Squigly answers to acknowledge her presence. "Where are you?!"

"Patience, my dear. We have nothing but time."

Refusing to stay put Squigly runs ahead to find her, it didn't even matter where she was going she just needed to find her and with how her voice echoed throughout the halls it was like she was the estate itself.

"You can pretend you're facing your fears by coming here but the truth is...stepping foot in this place just reminds you of what you couldn't stop, doesn't it?"

Squigly kept running, her anger boiling more than ever.

"Squigly, don't let her manipulate you." Leviathan tried to calm her down but his words only fell on deaf ears at this point, Squigly wanted blood.

"It rattles you, doesn't it, Sienna?" The woman continued to taunt her with questions relating to the massacre. "These ruins are just scars. The dirt and soil hiding the blood that was spilled, but you remember exactly what happened."

Squigly stopped and slid across the floor, heavy traces of dust rising as she came to a stop. "STOP MESSING WITH ME AND COME OUT!"

Almost immediately Black Dahlia appeared behind her, the moon acted as the only source of light since there was no power.

"Temper, temper. You should really learn to control yourself, it's not attractive."

Squigly turned around and faced Dahlia, she had no idea she was close enough to appear so suddenly but she had her. "I'm going to make you pay..." She mutters.

"Still dwelling on that? You're a sad sight, but brave, I give you that. Coming here alone was gutsy..."
Then again it was best you didn't bring your friends, I would've killed them just like I did your family."

Squigly snapped in an instant, she lets out a furious shout before rushing in to fight, throwing a heavy right punch which was easily dodged by Dahlia moving to the side, Squigly follows-up by circling around with a reverse hook kick but Dahlia proves her speed to be superior by ducking and taking a step back to get some distance between them.

Squigly closes the gap by running after her, throwing punch after punch, but each attack was effortlessly dodged until Dahlia grew tired of evading — she spins around during one of Squigly jabs and delivers a powerful backhand punch across Squigly's face, sending her stumbling back to relish in the attack.

The punch was pretty heavy but Squigly's anger numbed whatever pain she was feeling and got back into the fight, throwing blow after blow only to have Dahlia continue to dodge each and every attack, though she was able to force Dahlia to take some steps back, Squigly's intent was to get her back against the wall.

Seeing that Squigly cocked her arm back to throw a punch Dahlia finds her opening and rushes in, she grabs Squigly's wrist mid-punch and bent her arm back in the opposite direction — far enough to force the singer onto her back, this submissive hold was so quick Squigly made a hard landing on the floor.

"You want to take vengeance on the Medici's and then you befriend one? Your mother would turn over in her grave, child."

"Leviathan, now!"

The parasite opened his mouth, his dragon breath ready to be unleashed, unfortunately Dahlia was prepared to counter this, she moves her hand off of Squigly's wrist and grabbed a hold of Leviathan's face in its entirety at the moment he was ready to fire, resulting in fire seeping through her fingers and causing a massive explosion which destroyed the floor they were on and lead to the lower levels, apparently they were on the 2nd floor of the abandoned estate.

Squigly falls and lands on the dirty floor, her back sore from the landing.

"Oooow... Leviathan, are you ok?"

She looks over and sees that his face was heavily burnt from having Dahlia counter his attack, he didn't respond because he was out cold.

"Leviathan? Leviathan?" She gets up and cradles the unconscious parasite in her arms.

"Do you see how powerless you are to save your loved ones?"

Dahlia's voice sent a shiver down Squigly's spine and she quickly rose to her feet, her opponent was standing right in front of her — before she could even react the mobster sends a clean punch, too quick to predict, and hits Squigly dead center in the face and was followed-up by a round kick to the gut, sending her flying down the hall.

Squigly picks herself but was at a severe shortage of breath from getting the wind kicked out of her, and with Leviathan out of commission it was down to just the two girls in this heated brawl.

Dahlia menacingly walks toward her but builds up to a sprint, Squigly was at a disadvantage from the lack of air and couldn't think of any way to defend herself — the young fighter tanked the attack
she was dealt but was sent back a few feet, she wouldn't get the chance take another as she was immediately met with an uppercut by Dahlia's shotgun arm, launching Squigly off of her feet and onto her back.

Dahlia didn't see reason to let the pain settle, she grabs the skull breastplate on Squigly's chest and picked her up, right off the ground so they met at eye level, she held her shotgun arm back and shoves it into Squigly's torso, propelling her back which ended up tearing off the skull plate since she was still holding it during the punch.

Rolling along the ground Squigly was able to recover and get back up to her feet, but Dahlia was relentless and already in her face, it was like she was teleporting to get so close. Squigly is able to defend herself by crossing her arms but this would prove irrelevant as Dahlia's punch was still strong enough to send her back, once again forcing Squigly onto her back with considerable force.

The fight was beginning to become one sided, Squigly was clearly no match for Dahlia and she was now seeing she was outmatched but it was too late to back down.

Dahlia jumps into the air and descends with a dive kick, luckily Squigly was able to roll back and push herself up to her feet — however the attacks were oncoming the moment she recovered; she was backhanded across the left cheek by Dahlia's fist, punched on the opposite cheek and then uppercutted, all by the same hand in three consecutive blows.

Squigly stumbles back and was able to dodge a few attacks that followed after, but Dahlia's speed was picking up making it impossible to match the pace. In the next room Squigly was sent flying through one of the last good doors that remained, breaking it right off the hinges.

Exhausted Squigly was beginning to have trouble getting herself up but that didn't stop Dahlia and the fight continued: Squigly was punched, kicked, slammed, tossed and just outright brutalized throughout the brawl, no amount of training could've prepared her for the superhuman abilities Dahlia was demonstrating.

Nearby the Player and Filia were approaching the estate with the former leading the latter via Heart Syncing. "Do you feel anything?" Filia asked.

The Player had to stop and focus, closing his eyes and trying his best to get a lock on Squigly. "...Yeah, I can feel her. She should be-"

To answer his question a loud crash came from the abandoned mansion, like someone threw something heavy into some furniture, "GAAAAAAAAHHHHH!" that pain filled scream that came with it horrified them, it was beginning to sound like a slaughterhouse to make it even worse the voice was familiar.

"Squigly?!" Filia wasted no time and ran toward the building.

The Player held out his hand to her. "Wait! Don't get reckless!" It was too late for reason but there was no mistaking it, Squigly WAS in there and they had to get her out.

Filia opens the front doors and enters the foyer, the Player, having caught up, comes in behind her. It was too dark to see but the more they opened the doors the more the moon illuminated for them, in the center of the room was Squigly who was slowly crawling out of the darkness.

"...What the hell?!" The Player was uncertain of what to make of this but he steps forward. "Sienna?"
Hearing her name she looks up in horror and reveals her heavily damaged state: she was covered in bruises and scratches, her outfit was torn up and the only eye she had left was barely able to stay open. Leviathan remained unconscious with his burnt face. The Player, Filia and even Samson were utterly shocked to discover their friends like this.

Squigly finds the strength to pick herself up and checked the area for danger, Dahlia was nowhere to be found.

"W-Why are you here?!" She directs her attention to the two. "Did you follow me?!"

The Player approaches her, clearly seeing she was afraid. "Squigly, what happened? Who did this?" He tried his best to remain calm in order to level her down.

"That woman who attacked me, Black Dahlia, she's going to kill you if you don't leave!" She grabs the Player by his jacket and tries to force him out but he grabs her by the arms and stands his ground causing Squigly to look up to him. "GO!" She demands.

"Please, take it easy." He continued talking to her as calmly as possible before looking around the area but it was rather obvious nobody was there. "There's nobody here. What happened?"

"The Medicis...they're back and they have to be stopped. How can you expect me to stay calm when those monsters are out there?!"

"You don't have to worry about them. Marie ran the Medicis out of town, remember? We haven't seen them in months."

Refusing to accept that Squigly shakes her head in disapproval. "No! That's not the point! They're out there and they're going to kill you once they find you! They've already ruined so many lives and now we're just going to let them back in?!"

"There are no Medici!" The Player exclaimed while gently shaking her by the shoulders. He was becoming frustrated she was being so hardheaded. "Will you just tell me what happened?!"

Seeing that he wouldn't listen Squigly just brushes past him. "No. I won't stand here and talk trivial matters with you, I'm wasting time. I have to make sure they don't hurt anyone else again..."

Filia reaches her hand out and touches Squigly's shoulder. "...Hey, we just want-"

SMACK!

Squigly slaps Filia's hand away the moment she felt her touch, giving her a look of disgust. "Don't touch me, you Medici filth! You're probably the one who lead them here!"

Shocked Filia backs away, wide eyed and clearly hurt she would say such a thing. Her eyes were quickly filled with tears because she was scared of what was becoming of her friend.

"S-Squigly...what's...what's happening to you?" Her voice cracked in sadness.

"You're all the same! All of you Medici scum! I have to stop you...if nobody else will then I'll just do it myself! I'll take you all out! Including you!"

"SIENNA!" The Player angrily lashed out at her in a strong voice which got her attention.

The two unintentionally Heart Sync with one another which ended up harming Squigly via a powerful electrical shock brought on by her aura, she screams out in pain and collapses to the ground
before losing consciousness almost immediately. The Player was affected as well, having a severe shortage of breath and extreme fatigue causing him to fall to his hands and knees but he didn't black out.

Everything was happening so fast and Filia just couldn't comprehend what was going on or why Squigly was acting the way she was, her head felt like it was going to explode with all these emotions going on. Whatever was happening she just wanted it to end.

Later that night the Player and Filia recollect themselves and left the premises with Squigly.

They return home and put Squigly in bed but sleep wasn't an option, this was a serious matter that needed an answer but the two were stumped. The Player stood by the bedside to look over Squigly in this bad condition, it was almost unbearable to see.

"...Sienna, what's wrong with you?" The Player asked himself. "What is it that's bothering you so much?"

While he remained standing the sound of the door opening caught his attention where he sees Filia peaking in.

"Is she...?"

He takes a second to look back at Squigly before making his way over to Filia to discuss her condition. Once outside the room he closes the door and sighs.

"She's roughed up but she'll live."

Filia felt like she was finally able to breathe again and exhales calmly. "Good."

"What happened back there?" Samson asked. "The Contiello girl got that weird aura thing Filia and I usually get when you do that power-up, except she got hurt by it."

"...I don't know." The Player answered. "It's weird because I didn't try initiating a sync, and I'm sure she didn't either, but there was definitely a connection and I felt her. She's so scared and angry, I can't grasp it."

In the room Squigly was starting to come around, her eye twitches a bit before finally opening to see the ceiling fan above her, she rises up in a panic and looks around, she was in the safety of her room and as such felt safe but her worries resurfaced now that she realized they could've been traced back to the apartment.

"It's...actually starting to scare me."

She could hear the Player talking from beyond the door and settled down the moment she heard him.

"I don't know what's wrong. I don't know what's hurting her and I'm scared I won't be able to help, what if she ends up killing herself over all this stress? It's bad enough she's been hiding these feelings from us all this time but now..."

His words made her start to realize the repercussions of her actions and now was a better time than any to reflect since she was safe. She lays back and rests her head on the pillow, Leviathan was still injured and recovering in her head so she didn't have anyone to speak to.

"...What am I supposed to do?" Squigly asked herself.
"It's simple." A familiar voice reaches her ears putting the girl on high alert but before she could react an arm springs out of the mattress and wraps around Squigly's mouth to keep her from shouting, it was like a scene straight out of a horror movie. "You let me kill your friends so you don't ever have to worry about losing anyone else again. I promise you, once you're free, it won't ever hurt again." Black Dahlia's face slowly phases through the pillow, having her twisted mug appear beside her.

Back outside the Player is seen sitting on the floor outside the door while contemplating his worth to Squigly as a partner.

"I wouldn't be surprised if this was all my fault. I've been so busy trying to keep her hidden away what else should I have expected? I was never there for her...months on end just keeping her locked away, even after I told her she was free to live life for once. I'm such a hypocrite."

"That's not true." Filia says, now crouching down to him. "You only did what you thought was right. You were trying to protect her and rightfully so. If people ever found out about her condition and found out Marie was still alive then there's no telling what would happen to Squigly. She knows that and she never held any resentment to you. I'm the problem."

"You?" He questioned doubtfully.

"I'm a Medici, remember? I know she said we were friends but I can understand if living with me is too much. It can't be easy knowing you're associated with someone who carries the same blood as the people who took everything from you. I think that's why that monster, Double, taunted her with that knowledge before."

"You can't remember your past, Filia. You shouldn't blame yourself for that."

"But...still..."

Samson scoffs with his tendrils on his head, mimicking the act of pulling out his own hair. "For the love of- Will you two cut the sorry act? All you need to do is be there for her. Jeez, I've never seen you two be so depressing. It's starting to make me sick. I'm especially disappointed in you, chump."

He was of course referring to the Player.

"Huh?"

"You're the one always gawking about your ties to people now suddenly you're being mopey. Sack up and face the challenge head on, I don't want to see this crap again. If you honestly think you aren't worth a damn then let Filia remind you why you're here. I've been telling you weren't shit since we met but suddenly a little bit of self-pity makes you start thinking that way? Give me a break." That was basically Samson's way of telling the Player to cheer up.

The Player was stunned Samson offered these words of encouragement and directs his gaze to Filia who was just as surprised. The group has always relied on each other for support so why start doubting themselves now? When in doubt you live without all you have known, it was just one of those examples of life challenging your resolve.

The Player looks down to his lap and nods his head before responding. "...You're right."

"Ugh, here we go with the-" Samson had to cut himself short, believing the Player was going to make some snarky remark. "Wait, what?"

He looks up so that he met Samson's curious glance. "I said you're right. You're absolutely right, Samson. Thank you."
"...Huh. Well, of course I'm right. Um...yeah. Just make sure it doesn't happen again. If you and Filia end up being depressed little shits then nobody will be there to balance you out."

"There's always Squigly and Leviathan." Filia corrected.

"And Cerebella. Not to mention Parasoul, Umbrella, Nadia, Feng and even you, Samson." The Player added.

Samson closed his eyes, formed a hand with his tendril and flagged it away at the duo. "Ok, ok. Let's not go overboard now. I'm not down for that sentimental crap."

"Right." Both the Player and Filia replied but with tender smiles of appreciation to the parasite.

The sound of glass shattered breaks the pairs moment and horrifies them, they quickly get up from the floor and rush in only to find Squigly missing and the bedroom window destroyed. The duo run to the window and look out only to see the dark alley below and heavy rainfall, Squigly was nowhere to be found.

"W-Where did she go?!" Filia asked in a panic.

The Player scouts the narrow alley but nothing, there was no trace of her. "I don't know. I didn't even hear her get up, she's like a goddamn ninja."

"No... No, no, no! This is bad. This is so bad!" Filia begins to pace back and forth, tonight was certainly a stressful one.

Seeing no other option the Player turns to his last option, he inhales calmly and exhales to get himself together. He closed his eyes and focused, opening up his senses to try and reach Squigly.

"What are you doing?" Samson asked.

"I'm trying to find Squigly. Just give me a second."

He had to free his mind of all worry, he put the utmost faith in Squigly and found peace despite the urgency of the situation. He ascends and his vision rushes through the city in a blur, following a specific trail which seemingly lead to Squigly's current location. Considering the condition her heart was in it served as a SOS beacon making her whereabouts easy to trace.

Squigly, feeling this sudden influence over her body, jumps but it was all part of the experience, it was familiar and warm, she looks around frantically. "P-Player?! Are you here?!" She called out, sounding rather frightened.

'Squigly, ugh, I'm here but the connection is weak, your heart. You need to calm down...'

"What?! No! The Medicis! Black Dahlia! They're here and they want to kill me! They want to destroy all traces of the Contiello name!"

'Squigly! I know it's hard but you have to let me in. I can't help if you don't let me in.'

"No. Please, I can't get you involved...I don't want to lose you too. You're all I have left..." She wraps her arms around herself and collapses to her knees, embracing herself as her fears overpowered her already unstable mind and broke her down.

The Player was watching from Squigly's point of view so as she was looking down to the ground he was too, but suddenly a pair of heels materialized before her. Squigly looks up only to see Black
Dahlia backhanding her shotgun arm in the direction of her face. Just as impact was made the Player, back at the apartment, gasps loudly as if breathing for air.

"...Who was that?"

"Are you ok?! What happened?!" Filia was now worried for the Player's condition but this was the result of forcing himself to sync with Squigly in her current state which took its toll on him.

"Squigly... She...ugh..."

"Breathe... Did you find Squigly?"

"She wasn't lying. There's someone after her and they just appeared out of nowhere. I don't even know if it was human, there was a gun on its arm. Squigly is fighting someone, or someTHING, and her body can't take much more... Filia, she's in danger."

Meanwhile Squigly continued her fight with Black Dahlia — the latter of the two remained the superior combatant, unfortunately this didn't stop Squigly from trying to find an edge, a choice that was killing her.

She throws a few stabbing jabs but every attack was dodged or blocked, Dahlia allowed her to throw one last punch but grabs Squigly by the wrist just as her knuckles were on the verge of making contact with her face, she gets behind Squigly and applies a painful reverse arm lock — it was enough to have bone audible crack from her shoulder, forcing her onto her knees like a sadistic game of mercy.

Squigly's screams of pain would soon follow after but Dahlia silenced her by releasing her arm in favor of a reverse low kick to her side, having her heel strike her rib cage, sending her rolling across the wet grass.

Squigly is barely able to pick herself up but she manages to stand on her own two feet, commendable after taking such harsh punishment but her efforts earned her an immediate combo from the attacker: a punch to the gut followed by a powerful hook in the face with the barrel of Dahlia's shotgun, she was now sent down the grassy hill until she reached the bottom, where her back hits a tree.

She looks up to see Dahlia already appearing in front of her, it wasn't humanly possible to move this fast, but Squigly was able to react and rolls to the side as Dahlia strikes the tree she was up against and though her dodge was successful she had to take a breather on all fours.

Dahlia appears before Squigly again and lifts her up by the throat, taking her right off of the ground and forcing her to look skyward, breaking her slender neck was all in the realm of possibility but there was no fun in that for the cruel older woman, instead she tosses Squigly's body and sends her a considerable distance, throwing her into a nearby creak.

Squigly was unable to move due to the lack of energy. The area they were in was revealed to be the groups Training Ground, the fight returned where it all began and it was going to end there as well.

Unable to stand Squigly nearly finds herself drowning in the shallow water but she was 'saved' by Dahlia via raising her head by the good ponytail.

"How the mighty have fallen." Black Dahlia cruelly taunts the survivor.

She drags Squigly out of the creak and drops her on the ground. "Why...are you...doing this?" Squigly manages to find the strength to speak.
"Why? It's all part of the business."

Following her answer Dahlia proceeds to kick Squigly in the stomach, making her roll a few feet away where she then coughs out a large chunk of saliva. Dahlia placed her heel on top of Squigly's head to grind her face into the dirt.

"It's about reminding those beneath us that we're still in power and in control. The Medicis remain untouched and will continue to reign over the city, even over the might of the Skullgirl. We are in power! You? We just had unfinished business."

Squigly looks up to Dahlia with her eye barely open. "You...don't have any power... You're not untouchable. Lorenzo will...get what's coming to him and your empire will fall."

Dahlia huffs and smiles amusingly, she lowers herself down and grabs onto Squigly by the shirt, where her skull chest plate would be if it weren't torn off. "Oh really? And who's going to stop us?"

"My...friends will-"

"Don't make me laugh." She deliberately cuts Squigly short and interestingly this causes her body to flickered for a brief instant. "Your friends. Heh... Ok, Sienna. Let's talk about your 'friends'." She drops her onto the ground again, treating her as if she was nothing. "Leviathan, that boy you only know as 'Player', Filia and Samson, everyone who you thought was a friend in this empty world of suffering, when all those with the same blood as you are gone and you have no one: where are they Sienna? Right now? When you need them the most."

She didn't have an answer but at the same time she realized the reason for this was because she wouldn't let them, had she allowed herself to let them in on her dilemma then there was no doubt in her mind that the Player and Filia would be by her side. In the case of Leviathan he got hurt trying to protect her, this wasn't out of the ordinary, for either of them, and past performances has proven this would always be the case if it meant keeping her safe.

Those thoughts of sorrow, that fear, anger and hatred she once felt slowly fades as she finally comes around to understanding her connection to those she hold dear in the present, the memories of their time together was like pure light that helped Squigly along when she felt cold and alone. With each thought of her loved ones Dahlia blinks in and out of existence which Squigly begins to notice.

Still weak she manages to pick herself up, weary and shaky in the knees, but she stands her ground and held her right hand up to her heart.

"They're here..."

"They're 'here'? Ha! What are you going on about?"

"They'll always be here and if I die tonight, in the act of protecting them from monsters like you, then so be it. It's worth it." Her speech was becoming more defined, she spoke with confidence and stood her ground. "They're the ones who matter most. I have faith in them and they will stop you if I can't."

With Squigly's mind being steered in the right direction things were becoming clear and at the same time Dahlia's entire being was fading out of existence. Sensing this new development the now annoyed Dahlia charges for Squigly with the intent to kill.

"They won't matter once I end you!"

She takes aim with her shotgun, ready to deal the final blow and Squigly braces for the worse but doesn't look away. "Sienna!" A familiar voice called out to her from behind, catching her attention
but in the middle of Dahlia's charge she completely fades out of existence much to Squigly's shock. The Player and Filia are seen running to her as she looks around.

"Sienna!" The Player called out again just before reaching her. "Sienna, are you ok?!"

Her answer came in the form of a smile that she shows the moment she faces them, she takes a step forward but collapses, the Player was able to catch her before she could hit the ground and she apparently blacks out. The Player looks over to Filia and she looks back at him, unsure what to make of the turn of events.

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**Grand Cathedral Ruins**  
**Marie's Hideout, 1:32am**

Seeing that their problem couldn't be solved with just a nights rest the Player takes Squigly to the only person who could help at this point — Marie, the Skullgirl herself.

Once they arrived Marie lends them her bed so Squigly could have a place to lay while unconscious, but she awakens shortly after due to the overwhelming theonite radiating from Marie's presence.

Now that she was up the group explained everything that was going on throughout the day.

"...I see." Marie speaks now that she heard everything. "Your heart was painting the picture it so desperately wanted to see. You were so consumed by fear, anger and hate that your heart essentially created a force that only you could see, hear and feel. It chose the image of that woman because your memories of that tragic day were the most prominent and influential. Do you remember what I told you when we first met?"

"About my will?"

"Yes. It continues to deteriorate, that explains why you were so powerless against your target, and I believe you once said, 'the Skull Heart's corruption is poison', so you should already know that you're connected to its influence just as much as I am. Combine all of that together and you start to feel its effects. Not to mention the emotional stress you've endured after all this time."

"So that explains why we never saw that woman." Filia looks over to the Player now that things were a bit easier to understand.

The Player took a moment to think on it but quickly came to a conclusion. "How convenient." He says rather plainly.

"It's a good thing you got everything worked out." Said Marie. "Any later and you probably wouldn't be here. Your heart was in critical condition."

The whole ordeal was Squigly fighting a phantom casted by the shadows of her heart and faltering will, a force she unintentionally created from letting her emotions drown her in a sea of obsessive vengeance — she felt horrible, especially after lashing out at Filia so furiously, but if that didn't break her enough then Leviathan's injury surely brought it home.

Squigly sighs and stands up from the bed. "I'm sorry." Her words earned her the attention of the others in the room. "I didn't mean to hurt you the way I did. I'll never forgive myself for how stupid I acted tonight... I've been living with this pain for over 14 years and it's so hard to let it go. I felt like it was my burden to bear, alone, with no one else. I lost my family and the thought of losing anyone else who got close scared me. I understand if you hate me for the way I treated you."
She was immediately brought into a hug by Filia who was relieved to finally know her friend was going to be ok. "Don't be stupid..." She said softly. "We would never hate you. We were worried sick and thought we'd lose you."

"You're never alone, Sienna." The Player added. "You will never have to bottle up your emotions like that because we're here for you. I understand what was going on in your head and you had the best intentions, but you need to let us in and allow us to help, you can't be Supergirl all the time. You're not the only one who wants to put a stop to that organization, so if they ever do come back we'll be there and we'll handle them. Together."

"Just promise us you won't ever do this again. It hurts more than anything the bad guys could ever do to us."

Their compassion moved Squigly in ways she hadn't felt before, she wraps her arms around Filia and closes her eyes to let herself sink in the warmth of her friend.

"...I promise."

She had never felt this kind of happiness, it was practically paralyzing her in joy, added she was still trying to come to terms with the immense guilt she had so it was another confusing mix of feelings.

"I'm sorry." Squigly apologized wholeheartedly with a crack in her voice, slowly falling down to her knees while holding Filia's hand in her own. "...I'm sorry. I'm so sorry." Her head was hanging, facing the ground and she goes down even further until her forehead was touching floor. "...I-I'm so sorry...

Light sobbing could be heard from her and Filia watches as Squigly apologized repeatedly. The Player, who was still away from the two, watched in silence as well but he feels a hand grab onto him, he looks to his right and sees Marie prompting him to move on to comfort his friends.

It didn't take him long to take the hint and he proceeds, the Player pats Filia on the back to get her attention and she directs her gaze in his direction to see him smiling at her. Now that they were reunited and things were normal, rough but normal, they were finally able to put their hearts at ease.

The Player wraps one arm around Filia and she does the same, the two get down onto their knees and wrapped the other arm around Squigly. Feeling their touch she looks up to their smiling faces which provokes her to sob even more before bursting out into a powerful cry. Squigly wraps her arms around her friends and leans into them for a hug huddle. The trio was going to sit like this for as long as they needed to.

Marie looks on, stoic as ever, but seeing them together managed to put a smile on her face. It made her happy to see the Player eased into his role as this 'chosen entity' he was so strongly against when they first met, it was like he evolved into a new person, a more responsible soul. If this was the development she was seeing then perhaps the dark future that awaited her wouldn't be so bad...

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A/N: My goal was to keep it below 10k words but it didn't work out, bleh. Also there was supposed to be a chapter before this, the "Squigly!" chapter but I felt this belonged ahead of time to further cement Squigly's relationship with her friends before having her dive into the whole syncing tutorial but now that they had this extra development I think it'll be easier to write it out. I should be able to jump into the next step without much of an issue: what is the next step? Multi-Syncing aka using two characters in Skullgirls lol.

Now, about the chapter itself...I wanted to explore the tragedy of Squigly's character and
show just how much weight she carries even when she seems all fine and dandy. If you look at Squigly's character bio her top dislikes are the Medici, Black Dahlia and Double, I had Squigly confront Double already so I wanted to use Black Dahlia for this chapter, or should I say her image? Since the Black Dahlia in this chapter was a figment of Squigly's tortured mind. Also this marks the first time the Player addressed Squigly by her nickname, which is Squigly, rather than using her real name.

Squigly is the star here so let's talk more about her for a bit — Usually Squigly is the most mature, graceful and calm but thinking about her character, both here and in the actual game, I wondered "What if Squigly had a breaking point?", it certainly seems like it would be possible all things considered: Her entire family was massacred in front of her, lost her life at a very young age, she got revived and had to help kill her own mother who was a Skullgirl and to make matters worse she is only able to live life whenever a new Skullgirl rises which just serves as a frequent reminder that her life was ruined. Poor girl.

Heart Syncing works two ways, the one we're familiar with super charges the Skullgirls character but it can also work against the users as seen earlier. Remember when Squigly got electrocuted by her aura? That was one of the instances of the ability backfiring. Squigly was so overcome with negativity that it ended up hurting them both, though she got it the worst because her emotions were the cause.

This chapter's inspiration comes from Dead Space 2, Teen Titans and Kingdom Hearts where the heroes were plagued with hallucinations and forces that haunted them in the real world despite the villain not actually being there. Another big influence came from a YouTuber named HotDamniRock where he made a skit about suicidal thoughts which involved an angel and demon trying to persuade his character to see their side in his situation, it's some pretty heavy stuff. Now I need to think about how I'm going to deal with Painwheel since her story is very depressing AND tragic.

I'll show more examples of how it can negatively affect the users in the future but for the sake of keeping this a spoiler free note I'll just leave it at that.
Chaining Memories

Rommelgrad Ruins, No Man's Land
Time Unknown

The silhouette of a young girl pleading at the feet of an adult woman is seen as the stained glass symbol of the Trinity's eye presents itself in the background. The older woman holds out her hands as the Skull Heart levitates before the youth.

"You needn't run any more, child." The woman spoke in a demonic voice, revealing her identity as Double. "The Trinity has heard your cries."

The youth's face in the light shows her to be Marie before she became the Skullgirl. She looks on with a conflicted stare, the events leading Marie to this point put her in a state of despair, sadness, confusion and fear.

Everything began in the act of desperation to save a friend...

It All Began With
A Wish

The Seed of Hope

No Man's Land
Autumn

Countless medical tools lie about the ruined badlands as the scene of a massive battle seemed to have taken place, syringes, scalpels, medical IV's and so on were scattered about, leading to the sight of four women lying on the ground, their injuries and pools of blood marked their deaths...all that remained was Marie holding another woman at her mercy, standing before her as Double watched.

Valentine is shown as the one who was on her knees as Marie held one a scythe-like bone weapon at her neck, threatening to decapitate her. Valentine looks on, fearing what was to become of her if she didn't surrender to the Skullgirls might.

"For once in your LIFE, Val, listen to my orders! She's undefended...this could be our only chance! You're the ONLY ONE among us powerful enough to finish our mission!" A familiar voice echoed in the nurses head much to Valentine's visible grief.

"Our assault...the Last Hope...was it...for nothing?" She thought to herself, Marie continued to stare her down like she was establishing dominance over a dog.

"The world is wrought with horrors beyond your comprehension." Double says to Valentine in her disturbing voice. "Accept your fate and join your comrades. Some might call it 'honorable,' if that pathetic sentiment is any comfort."

"If you're going to kill me, just shut up and get it over with." Valentine's words were fearless but her heart was trembling.

Challenging her words Double held her hand at the back of the nurses head, execution style, and readied the killing strike. "It would be my pleasure. Say your prayers." She smiled.
Marie's eyes shift over to Double. "No. We may need her." She says, revealing why she hasn't already taken Valentine's life.

"What?" Double questions, sounding surprised yet also annoyed. "I don't see how-"

"Their science somehow lead them to me so quickly, all the way out here. I cannot use this power in their country without fighting it as a whole."

Double saw the logic in her reasons and lowered her hand from Valentine, sparing her life as a benefit and nothing else. A drop of sweat ran down the side of Valentine's face as the suspense was wracking her nerves.

Marie returns her glance to Valentine. "Do you wish to live? I seek vengeance against the Medici Mafia. I must not be waylaid by those who would stand in my way. Help me in my hunt and lives will be spared, including yours."

Her story piqued Valentine's interest, she looks up into the eyes of the Skullgirl and saw nothing, she was unreadable and in turn it scared the Last Hope survivor, especially for a girl who is so young.

"We may share an enemy, true. But what you've done...to my teammates, my...friends." The intimidation in Valentine's eyes was now gone, in just a second, the moment her friends came into the picture she gave the Skullgirl a challenging glare. "How could I ever trust you?"

"I told them they would die, and they died." Marie explains rather coldly. "I am The Skullgirl. I care not for the petty machinations of mortal men and women. Help me destroy the Medici Mafia, or be destroyed yourself." She reminds Valentine of her situation by inching the blade of her scythe closer to the back of her neck.

'...You're the ONLY ONE...' The memory of her comrades words once again reminded her of this crucial information. '...finish our mission...'

Valentine closes her eyes and contemplates, the only friends she had were dead and now only she remained. She opened her eye and looks back up to the Skullgirl. "Very well, you win. I'll help you."

Having her answer Marie lowered her scythe, freeing Valentine from the worries of imminent death. With a new ally gained she begins to walk away as if the situation was nothing, meanwhile Valentine falls to her hands as sweat drips off of her head and makes moist drops on the dry ground below her. The visage of Painwheel flashed in her head.

'I guess I don't have any choice... It's up to her now... Painwheel will need to finish what I couldn't.'

A Promise to Keep

Canopy Kingdom, Grand Cathedral
Autumn

Marie, now fully embracing the Skullgirl title, resides in the Catacombs beneath the Grand Cathedral with Double.

"Double, you are to attack Anti-Skullgirl Lab 8 and destroy as much of their research as possible." The Skullgirl orders with an emotionless stare and monotone voice. "However, you must leave Peacock alone."
"I cannot comply -" Double replies immediately. "Peacock is perhaps the most serious threat to our mission here. To let her live would be a folly."

Marie clenches her fist on the verge of showing wrath, but she calms herself to prevent chaos from breaking out, she had no idea what she was capable of at this stage in her development as the newest Skullgirl so keeping a level head was crucial.

"I command you to leave her alone - I made a promise."

"Irrelevant - your promises mean nothing to our masters. We live to serve them."

Marie exhales and shakes her head. "Never mind. I'll just have Valentine do it, it'll help keep up appearances. She handles espionage and assassination well so it should be a breeze for her. I don't need Lab 8 catching onto me once I'm out and hunting the Medicis."

"And Peacock?" Double questioned.

"That doesn't concern you."

Marie didn't offer Double a second glance, she just walks up the stairs leading to the higher levels of the Grand Cathedral. This was curious behavior but Double kept to herself, no need in questioning the Skullgirl so long as she remained 'under control'.

Valentine stood alone by the large statue of the Trinity, observing the figure intensely until she sensed the approach of her master. Valentine turns to see her coming from the secret passageway.

"Do you need something, Marie? How may I be of assistance?"

"Valentine, there are those that would interfere with my plan. Infiltrate Lab 8, and see to it they do not."

"As you wish, Marie - I'll leave at once."

Valentine bows to Marie respectfully and promptly takes her leave from the church. Marie watches her off with that same blank stare but she faces the statue of the Trinity and silently spites them.

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**Vigilante**

Overlooking the beautiful sight of New Meridian at night was the figure of a lone giant dressed in a trench coat and a trilby hat that covered most of their face, aside from size there was a large sax protruding from their backside, clearly this person wasn't human, or at least ALL human.

"New Meridian is a dangerous place. Even for me." The voice that narrated this bit of information was clearly male and belonged to the hulking figure. "Especially for me. I used to be a cop...and I always tried to do the right thing. But I got one thing wrong, and it just about cost me my life. You see, I thought the police were supposed to catch the bad guys. It doesn't work like that in New Meridian. My squad was on the take from the Medici Mafia. You can guess what happened next."

A collection of memories flashed by revealing the man as a once respected police officer, busting some of the Medici goons, particularly a group of women, most likely involving prostitution or some other form of illegal activity, but after the raid was done we cut to see a group of fellow officers violently beating down the man, showing no mercy to the pointing of mercilessly crippling him and leaving him to relish in his agony.
Once the flashback was over the man raised his head to reveal his eyes. "They left me for dead. They thought I was gone. Turns out that I'm full of surprises."

"Hey, bud! What are you waiting for? Just f##king jump!"

A random pedestrian from below broke the immersion of the intense scene and it was revealed that the man was standing on top of a suspension bridge, specifically the highest point on the tallest cable tower. He had an audience and even made traffic come to a halt just to see what was going on. Seeing this he grumbles in mild annoyance and jumps off the bridge much to the horror of the bystanders, however his legs seemingly retract into his coat and a large rocket comes out and he takes flight, soaring across the city.

Nobody was expecting this but it was a spectacle, some reacted with hype, cheering enthusiastically and giving praise for an awesome show, they didn't seem to realize they killed his buzz.

**Meanwhile, in New Meridian**

"As I was saying... These days, I walk a different beat. The Skullgirls. They play by a whole different set of rules, and they'll keep coming on coming until we put an end to the source of their power - the Skull Heart. That's my job. If I can do that, we don't have to worry - for a while."

Walking among the people as a hulking giant in a suspicious coat had its way of easily earning attention, but considering how stuff like this really wasn't out of the ordinary one could say the attention was stemming from the narration...which he was doing aloud, a mistake a certain someone made before his arrival in Canopy.

"To find the Skull Heart, I gotta track the Skullgirl. To track the Skullgirl, I gotta go where she'll be. Turns out this one has it in for the Medicis. This should be fun."

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**The Rose's Thorn**

In Maplecrest Valentine takes a detour in favor of scouting the area. "...Now let's see - that's 19 Medici-affiliated families in Maplecrest. Marie is going to have a field day with this." She smiles from behind her mask at the thought of the Medic's receiving a heavy blow.

"...YOU! VALENTINE!" A thick voice shouted from behind the unsuspecting nurse. Valentine turns to see a monstrous youth approaching her, female in appearance. "It was you! You're the one who took this life from me!"

Her appearance was initially shocking but the good doctor had to play it off as nothing and smiles. "Well, if it isn't Subject 0-84! ...What did Brain Drain call you again? Oh, right - 'Painwheel'. It's been swell, Painwheel, but I'm busy. Turn around and head back to the lab."

"NO!" She shouts with the eye holes in her mask showing an ominous red, reminiscent of Double's eyes.

"...No?" Valentine questioned, intrigued. "You've been programmed to obey your Lab 0 creators without fail. How can you resist my order?" She thought of many possibilities but at each one she found a flaw in the hypothesis she couldn't work with. "Let's try this again: invoking Command Protocol 51! Access code 36E-25-40! I order you to return to Lab 0 and forget you ever saw me."

"...AUGH!" The world around Painwheel transforms into a nightmarish version of itself, the sky was bloodshot red and the trees were a staticky white, the ground was all black. "GET OUT OF MY HEAD!" She shouts, revealing this hell to be her mind.
A ghoulish figured male appeared before her, it was impossible to make out just what exactly he was but what was apparent was a brain protected by a glass capsule. "CODE ACCEPTED - COMMAND PROTOCOL 51 INITIATED. OVERRIDING AUTONOMOUS CONTROL."

The strain on the girl's mind was a violent one, she was frequently in pain and fighting over who controlled her actions, it was a struggle, one which she was growing increasing tired of...

"No...!" She mutters weakly, one hand grasping her head as her eye focused on the man before her. "I'm so close! Valentine is right there! I can make her pay for what she did to me! And... What's this? I can sense the Skullgirl's aura on her!"

There was a flash of light that repelled the man's control, the one Valentine calls 'Brain Drain'. "RESISTANCE DETECTED. SUBJUGATING AND SEQUESTERING RESIDENT EGO."

Back in the real world Valentine watched as Painwheel writhed in agonizing pain on her knees. After the ordeal she throws herself up with both hands clutching her head. "AUGHHHH!


"I SAID NO!" Painwheel shouts rebelliously.

Her roar sent chills down Valentine's spine, and seeing that she had no answer for this it appeared that things were taking a dramatic turn. "Impossible... How could you overcome a Command Protocol? That shred of a soul we left you with shouldn't be enough to fight Brain Drain's control."

"I can feel the Skullgirl on you, Valentine!" Painwheel clearly wasn't interested in hearing anything her creator had to say about Brain Drain.

"Now that just won't do - it would seem I've been hanging around Marie too long and have been...tainted with her ethereal stink. The Skullgirl blood in you must be reacting to that. But, I wonder... Perhaps there's more to that blood than we knew. Let's conduct a little experiment - come to the Grand Cathedral of the Divine Trinity. I'll be waiting and so will the Skullgirl." Valentine turns her back to her creation and once again finds a smile hidden beyond that mouth mask. "See you there!"

In the blink of an eye she vanished, displaying that her ninja motif wasn't just for show. Painwheel looks around, shocked, but there was no sight of Valentine anywhere.

"Wait!" She called out but no answer, however a flash of darkness came into her mind and the image of Brain Drain briefly appeared causing electrical surges to spark around her body, she once again collapses and grasps her head.

While all this was going on Marie could be seen overlooking the streets of New Meridian, particularly the downtown area where the infamous Medici Tower stood tall over the entire city, like it was a beacon for the pests who inhabit the city. She doesn't say a word as the night air blew threw her hair and she was ready to begin her direct assault over the heart of the crime family.

A Lost Howl

The hero that did the impossible; the man that defeated a monster. He rallied a nation at war. There was a time when everyone could say, "I know Beowulf." During the Grand War, the people of the Canopy Kingdom were gripped with a terrible fear of the race of savage giants known as Gigans. They were unstoppable. Then came Beowulf. He defeated the brutal Gigan warrior Grendel in a no-holds-barred exhibition match as the nation watched. Seeing her son defeated, Grendel's mother was
consumed by rage and lashed out, but our hero didn't flinch. The hag went down. That day, Beowulf became a legend. It wasn't long before Wulfamania was running wild! Beowulf, the champion of a nation - a natural entertainer, remembered for his "Wulfpack" of fans, and for action figures the Canopy Kingdom's little boys couldn't live without.

But when the war ended, the patriotic spirit that fueled that adoration for Beowulf began to fade. After he left the ring, he was stuck with bit parts in cheap action flicks, game shows, and even infomercials. He didn't go out with a growl, but with a whimper, as the Bad Wolf Man on the popular kids' show Annie of the Stars.

Beowulf disappeared from the public eye. How long has it been since anybody's heard that famous howl?

"Shaddup, TV." A pillow was thrown at the television that was detailing the events of this 'Beowulf' legend in a documentary. The thrower of the pillow was revealed to be the very man, Beowulf, though in a much sorrier state rather than his handsome groomed prime. "I still got the howl. And I got the noise complaints to prove it!" He argued with the narrator who couldn't hear him.

He sighs heavily and gets up from his lazed position on the couch, grabbing a can of beer only to find that it was empty. He goes to the kitchen and fixes up a coffee instead, based on his appearance it was for the best - he was dressed in a robe, tank top, black/white stripped boxers and fuzzy pink slippers. His house was pretty dark so it was difficult to make out how exactly he was living but if his couch's surroundings was anything to go on it was probably a mess, littered with beer cans, the most notable household item was a large Gigan arm he had hung on the wall in his living room as a trophy, the arm of Grendel, his old foe.

Once he fixed his drink he reminiscent's his glory days, walking over to the Gigan appendage now that the documentary was over. "Those were the good ol' days, right? Hive five, buddy!" He held up his hand and awaited a response, perhaps it was the alcohol in his system that was getting him to speak to inanimate objects but nevertheless the arm didn't respond. "...C'mon, don't leave me hangin'."

The television plays the CKBN - Canopy Kingdom Breaking News theme which catches the attention of Beowulf.

'We interrupt Canopy Kingdom Celebrity Crash-Out for a breaking report! The Skullgirl has reappeared! Sightings have been confirmed in downtown New Meridian and Maplecrest!'

His shock of the news was met with a sudden slap to the back of the head by the giant hand which came to life. Beowulf's beloved chair, the Hurting, seemed to react to the slap...? But anyway...

"Ow!" Beowulf cried out now rubbing the back of his head. "Little late! Wait a sec... Did you slap me, bro? Not cool!" He didn't seem to act surprised in the slightest, even making it appear that the arm moving was normal.

The severed arm freed itself from its mounted position and falls to the floor, scurrying about in the house and making an even bigger mess than what was already present, Beowulf couldn't even get a second to clean up the coffee he spilled.

"Whoa! Dude, you need to chill out! What the heck's gotten into you?" He questioned while watching the arm move about.

The Gigans arm was able to detect Beowulf's presence and stopped moving around freely to focus on the man. Beowulf was tackled by the giant arm and forced back onto the floor.
"GAH! Oh! You wanna play rough?! Bring it on!"

Now the two were locked in a wrestling match, the sound of glass breaking and furniture being destroyed coming from outside the house along with various Beowulf's grunts and attack call-outs.

Later that night...

"...Our plan is proceeding apace." Double appears in her praying stance before the statuette of the Trinity in the Grand Cathedral.

... "Yes, somehow she wields your power to further her own agenda."

... "Understood - I will continue."

Beowulf had to forcibly drag Grendel's arm all the way to the Grand Cathedral in order to seek professional help for his problem, since fighting proved fruitless, it was like a father dragging his nagging child to a dentist or doctor appointment.

Once inside he was greeted by a familiar blonde nun, the only one who was known to work at the cathedral — Double, under her civilian guise 'Sister Agatha'.

"Sister, you gotta help me! This thing is possessed!" Now he was treating the situation with supernatural urgency.

"Is that the arm of a Gigan...?" Double asked, strangely she was speaking in a normal voice, a stark contrast to her demonic dual tone she usually demonstrated, chances were she was only doing this to keep up appearances as just a regular nun.

"W-What does it look like?" Beowulf questioned as the hand tried to humorously smoother his face much to the former's chagrin. "Quick, do an exorcism or something!"

Double puts her hand together in a praying gesture and her eyes remained closed - even when trying to appear human. "You should rid yourself of it, child. The dead are under the Skullgirl's control now..."

Hearing her made Beowulf take a moment to get off his Grendel problem, clearly showing a lack of interest in her suggestion. "Hey, I earned this trophy fair and square! She can't have it!" He turned the tables by hugging the arm protectively, the arm now trying to break free from Beowulf's control.

Double looks at him with a conflicted 'gaze' but performs an exorcism that appeared to have the arm enter a state of sleep after a flash of light appeared, it laid limp in Beowulf's arms.

"Finally!" He drops the Gigan arm onto the floor now that he was able to rest. "The stupid thing calmed down."

"You have been given a second chance. Renounce it. Be not prideful."

"Damn right I'm proud!" Beowulf excitedly exclaimed. "I'm gonna kick some Skullgirl butt!"

Double's confusion and exasperation was symbolized via a sweat drop trailing down the back of her head as she watched Beowulf pick up his trophy and rush out of the cathedral, apparently learning nothing.
After he leaves she opens her eyes to reveal that all too familiar red glow, she sighs but smiles...that couldn't be a good sign.

The Light in the Dark

At the Lab 8's living quarters the newest Anti-Skullgirl biomechanical weapon, Peacock, is taking the night off and sleeping in her hammock, apparently watching old cartoons for hours on end has a way of tiring the girl out.

"...Hey! Hey listen!" A tiny bird-like creature calls out to the sleeping youth but no response, seeing that she was out cold the bird jumps onto hammock and gives a loud "SQUAWK! Wake up, Peacock!" to alert her, which actually worked like a charm as she jumped out of her sleep. "The Theonite Resonance Detector is picking up a huge reaction downtown!"

Running into the room was Andy Anvil. "It's her, boss! The Skullgirl is on the move!" Andy was an anvil, no wonder how he got his name, wearing nothing but red boxing gloves, long white socks and a pair of red and white sneakers, he had that boxer motif going for him.

Hearing the news made Peacock crack a smile, flashing her sharp metal chompers in excitement. "Hot damn! Put some coffee on, and give me 15!" She wasted no time in getting ready, she jumped right out of her resting sling and got dressed, she geared herself up in nothing but oversized gloves, a top hat and a dress.

Waiting outside her bedroom was a cast of colorful characters: Avery, Andy Anvil, Tommy Ten-Tons, George Bomb(a small bomb with an 8-ball design) and Lonesome Lenny(an obese version of George Bomb). It didn't take Peacock long to get suited up, only took about 5 minutes actually, she was out of her room and ready to march out the lab with her crew of friends.

"Ready, everyone? It's time to paint the town red!"

She might've been ready but Andy had some concerns, so he leans in toward Avery who was standing on top of Tommy. "Psst...Avery? So did the boss take a bath, or what? And what does she brush her teeth with, anyway? Metal polish?"

Avery slouches over and his grin dulls at the question. "I think a bath and her usual routine were implied...but they aren't something the audience needs to see."

I agree with him, that's why you don't see it in-game, and why I didn't bother trying to detail it here. Oh, this is fourth wall breaking by the way, Peacock has that effect on everything it seems, so yeah.

HOT 2D FIGHTING!

Big Band's investigation lead him to one of New Meridian's biggest attractions - a casino that is run by none other than the Medici mafia, their influence in the city was much greater than anyone could comprehend, it's no wonder they've continued to have such a controlling hand in the criminal underworld.

"Time to check out the River King Casino. A Medici joint lit up like a Christmas tree with Theonite readings - if it's not the Skullgirl, I don't know what is."

Big Band managed to find his way inside without having to confront any of the guards or bouncers at the front door but his appearance didn't go without attracting the attention of the many gamblers and staff members, their stares didn't phase him, the only thing on his mind was the job he had to
complete. His investigation wouldn't go on ignored for much longer, a large muscular hand was laid upon his shoulder to grab his attention.

"Hey, you! Big guy in the coat! Hold it!"

When Big Band turned to face the one addressing him he finds the Medici enforcer standing there with suspicious eyes, it was Cerebella.

"Something I can help you with, little lady?" Big Band asked.

"I can tell you're a pro, and I don't mean at gambling. What're you doing here?"

Even if he didn't know she was working for the mafia there was no way he was going to come clean with a pedestrian, he had to keep up appearances. "Thought I might try my luck, maybe catch a show." He continued to play it cool, acting as if he had no idea what the young woman meant.

"Well, too bad. The show caught you!" Of course she wasn't going to make it easy for him. "I have a feeling there ain't just poker chips in those pockets. Open your coat!"

"That won't be necessary. I've seen what I need to. Turns out this just ain't my scene." Big Band turned his back to Cerebella, wanting to avoid a confrontation. "Why don't you get back to entertaining your adoring patrons with your acrobatics? I'll see myself to the door."

Before he could move Cerebella power walks ahead of him to stand in his way. "I'm not stupid, buddy! I don't know what you think you're up to, but I know guys like you. And if a guy like you doesn't work for us, well, he needs a damn good reason to be here. Get it?"

Big Band took notice of the approaching Medici goons but remained his usual calm and cool self, he didn't feel threatened in the slightest. "Girl, you don't know what you're asking for." He smiles from behind that mouth.

Cerebella and the goons surround the detective and were ready to jump but he remained unflinched, Big Band waited for them to attack and assumed his battle stance. The Medicis muscle charge in and attack. Seeing that a fight was about to breakout the casino bystanders either gathered around to watch or just carried out their business, a dangerous fight wasn't about to get in the way of making money for them.

**BAM! WHACK! POW! CRASH!**

One shortsighted brawl later and the goons were all spread out throughout the building. Big Band stood in triumph over the mess revealing the victor, Cerebella was barely standing with one arm holding the other in defeat.

"Jeez! One-man band? More like one-man army!"

Her comment earned a chuckle out of Big Band, he retracted his large mechanical fist into his coat and stood tall over her. "There was a time when I cared about wasting the Medicis, but y'all moved down a few notches in my priorities. Nowadays, I'm more worried about wasting my time."

Cerebella got one last look at the big guy before finally succumbing to her weak body, she falls onto her knees and then onto her side, laying in defeat with the rest of the goons, Big Bands years of experience proved too much for the young performer, but when one problem ends another rises - Big Band received an emergency SOS signal from Lab 8 and answered the call.

"Big Band! Come in! Lab 8 is under attack! You've got to hurry! We can't -" Bzzt! Suddenly the line
was cut and Big Band was just barely able to fully make out what was being said due to the intense static popping off in his ears.

"Since the Skullgirl didn't stick around...it looks like this was a setup." He looks down to Cerebella and lowers his head as an apology for hurting her. "Sorry, missie, but I've got somewhere else I've gotta be. You watch your step from now on."

The victorious veteran was now free to take his leave and with no one to stop him it was as easy as walking out the front door, the casino was still seeing business too, that fight didn't stop the money and that's probably all that mattered, but the mess wasn't something the higher ups would've been happy about, Luckily they weren't around to see it.

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**Destiny**

While things were getting underway in the downtown area of New Meridian Peacock's trail lead her to another one of the Skullgirls most frequented areas, Maplecrest. There was a line of Medici thugs laying in defeat as she brushed dust off of her clothes, she was the one who put them all out of commission along with her friends.

"Man... Who are all these posers getting between me and the Skullgirl?" Peacock asked her gang of cartoony pals with a look of boredom. "Don't they know who I am? I was built to beat Skullgirls! The sooner I get done with that Skullgirl, the sooner we can get back and watch 'Glorious Annie: Symphony of Star Stuff'."

Andy stepped forward with both of his gloves clenched into a fist, he was looking rather anxious. "Yeah, I gotta get back in time for wraaaaaaastling! I heard heard Beowulf was coming out of retirement!"

His impatience put a bright grin on Peacock's face, but before the gang could continue the hunt Avery was getting a transmission from home base, Lab 8. "SQUAWK! Hold it, everyone...! We've got a message coming in from Dr. Avian!"

ZRRTTT! - "Come i... Peacock-" ZZZTTTT! ZRRRZZ! "...ero-" ZTT! "-betray...us!" ZZRRR! "...Labs-" ZZZTT! "...under attack!"

The message came through via holographic sight from Avery's eyes, it displayed a video replay of Avian crawling away on the floor as the sound of destruction could be heard in the background as well as screams from the other Lab 8 scientists. While crawling a woman descended from above and lands behind him, seeing that he was already hurt she casually walks up to him and the outfit was very familiar, it was the same outfit worn by Valentine, there was no mistaking it was her leading the attack, though Peacock had no way of knowing.

"The Doc's in trouble!"

With no time to waste, and without even thinking about it, Peacock turned around and ran back in the direction she came - Avery and the others couldn't keep up with her sudden sprint but gave chase to the best of their abilities, but for all of them the journey back was a long one, they had to travel across town by foot so there was no way to save any time.

By the time the group arrived at the lab all that waited for them was destruction and corpses. Peacock stood in horror at the sight of such a massacre, these were people she knew, brilliant minds working to better tomorrow for the citizens of Canopy but now...
"We're too late..." Peacock said with a hint of sadness in her voice as she looks out to the ruins. "Whoever it was they really did a number on the lab."

As Peacock and her friends walk over the broken glass, rubble and machinery the body count just piled up, Peacock could identify most of them but she realized there was a large chunk of researchers missing, she had hoped they made it somewhere safe, for right now she wanted to make it her mission to find them to ensure they weren't harmed.

"Patricia..." A weak voice called out from the sides.

Andy heard the voice and looks around frantically. "Did you hear that? I think I heard Doc Avian!" And he was right, his eyes fell on the doctor and he was in severe condition.

Avian was covered in blood, limping out from the shadows of the labs remains. "P-Patricia..." He barely had energy to talk.

Horrified at what she saw Peacock rushed to his side even knowing there was nothing she could do to help him. "Doc Avian... Who did this to you?" She asked as she grabbed him to help him sit and rest against the wall.

"Lab 0... Valentine betrayed us. She let...the Skullgirl in."

The Skullgirl, Peacock's sworn enemy, she grit her teeth spitefully and clenched her fist. "Which way did they go!?"

"They fled to...New Meridian... Follow...but...make sure the others are safe..." Avian summoned enough strength to grasp Peacock's hand in his shaking palm, he looks at her with hope in his eye. "...I know you...can...protect everyone...I know you can defeat the Skullgi..."

The grip of his hand loosened and his eye narrowed with each blink until finally closing, his hand drops and he lays still against the wall. Peacock looks on in disbelief and placed her hands on his shoulders, wanting him to awaken.

"D-Doc...?"

Avery and the others knew that was it and they all lower their heads in grief. Tommy approaches Peacock from behind and placed his hand on her shoulder. "...He's gone boss." He says softly.

The truth was the last thing Peacock wanted to hear but deep down she knew this already, she lowered her head and shakes her head before coming to face that she was too late to save most of the lab. She gives Avian one last look, wrapping her arms around him to give him one final hug as a goodbye to the only father figure she had. With her last goodbye she stands up but continues looking down to him.

"Guys...get ready! Pissing me off is the last mistake those idiots'll ever make!"

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**Fragments of Sorrow**

About an hour after Peacock's departure from the ruins of Lab 8 Big Band finally arrived after his investigation at the River King Casino. He wasn't shocked to find what awaited him but it was horrible nevertheless, especially the body count.

"Somebody got in here and trashed the place. And while they were doing it, somebody else kept me out." While exploring what little he could Big Band soon discovered the corpse of Avian laying
against the nearby wall. "...Figures. It wasn't me they wanted. It was the Doc. Damn. My night just got a whole hell of a lot worse. Course, soon enough, theirs will too...when I catch up to them."

Big Band crouched down onto one knee and paid his respects to the deceased, but once it was all over he stood and looked around to see just how much damage was done. A simple fix would've been impossible, things were gonna have to start from scratch.

"They trashed this place good. They knew what to hit, and they knew how hard. They been in a lab like this before." Big Band took a few steps forward and the sound of metal clicking against the floor caught his attention, once he looked down he noticed unique scalpels lying around. He extended his arm-like appendage and carefully examined the tool using cotton pads to conserve the fingerprints. "...And these scalpels? They ain't the Doc's, and they sure as hell ain't what you'd find down at New Meridian General, either. That gives me some ideas." Big Band used his other arm to withdraw a small plastic bag he could keep the evidence in, once neatly placed he pulled both arms back into his trench coat. "Time to find the Lab 8 survivors before somebody else does."

Now that he gathered all that he needed it was now time to say goodbye to the old lab, Big Band takes one last gander at the once proud facility before turning away and making his way for the exit.

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**Dangerous Duo**

Fast forward ahead we see Peacock and her crew reuniting with the Lab 8 survivors - Stanley, Ileum, Leduc, Hive, as well as a group of young ASG children and scientists, some injured but nothing life threatening. It was early in the morning and they found sanctuary Under the Bridge, a less vivid and colorful side of New Meridian that the average person wouldn't even know existed considering how well known the city was for its glamour and shine: replacing the bright lights and neon signs are construction sites and factories, sewer maintenance tunnels, and a sizable barge floating in the river under the girder bridges.

With everyone safe it was now in Peacock's interest to continue the mission she was destined to complete. "That Skullgirl's got my blood on the boil. C'mon boys, we're off!"

Avery punches his palm with a sharp smirk. "It's murder time!" He was showing the most enthusiasm of the group.

Ileum steps in with a less violent thought in mind. "We're returning to Lab 8 to pick up the pieces, Peacock. That's our priority." The last thing she wanted was to frighten the children even more.

"I'm with Ileum." Leduc joins in from behind her. "This fight isn't over, and we need to get our hands on whatever might help."

"Who cares!?!" Peacock clearly had no interest in returning until the job was done.

"They might come back, Peacock." Said Hive. "We've got to get there firstzzzzzzzzzz."

Peacock closed her eyes and smiled at Hive's little tick. "Did you trade your brain for a beehive?"

Peacock turned to see Big Band standing there. "Aw, man! Not the blowhard!"
"Scram! Beat it!" Avery taunts from the top of Peacock's hat. "Get outta here, you big mook!"

Dismissing their mockery Big Band took a single step to the right, getting in the way of Peacock's exit. "Take it easy, Peacock. Stop and think."

"Thinkin' ain't my game, Brassafrass! My game is clobberin' Skullgirls!" She said with pride, her chest poking out as she tipped her hat. "Howsabout you take care of the kiddies while I exit stage left?"

"Big talk - but you ain't ready to walk that talk. We'll track her down and take her out together."

"Ol' saxy ain't gonna let you go! Clean his clock!" Avery suggested.

Knowing who he was dealing with a fight was probably the first thing she'd jump to. "Don't clown me, Peacock. I do not fool around." Big Band said in an authoritative tone.

"Too bad. Big Bird! All I do is fool around!" She met his stern face with a cocky grin that flashed her sharp teeth.

Peacock and her crew were ready for a showdown and Big Band had no intention of backing down as it meant the fate of Peacock rests in his hands. The newest ASG weapon vs the old school cop turned vigilante, Ileum decided it was best to let Big Band handle the situation considering she shared his views and fighting Peacock was well out of her league.

One misguided fight later sees the defeat of Peacock and her crew, Big Band once again proved his years of experience outmatched the rashness of the newer generation.

"You pack a wallop for an old guy -" Peacock admitted while laying on her backside looking up to him "but you can't stop this toon!"

Despite her defeat the young girl had more trick up her sleeve, she caught sight of Tommy Ten-Tons in position on the bridge directly above them, she smirks and placed her hands in front of her mouth.

"What are you doing?" Big Band questioned.

"Oh, Tommy~!" She called out.

"Excuse me." Tommy jumped off of the bridge and came plummeting down toward Big Band.

**CLAAANG!** A cartoony metal sound effect played off of the impact and Big Band was struck with all of Tommy's weight, his reaction was even a bit reminiscent of those old cartoons before blacking out temporarily. With Big Band in a daze Peacock and her crew banded together and made a getaway for their next outing.

Big Band was done seeing two shortly after they escaped. "...Nnngh. Damn! She's gone. That fool is gonna get herself killed. If she can't even take me out, there's no way she's ready to face off against a Skullgirl. And if I can't stop her, Dr. Avian's work goes down the drain." He looks back to the group of survivors with a look of determination, showing that he still had a job to do. "Ain't no way I'm gonna allow that - especially not now. Sorry, but I've gotta go after her."

"Don't worry about us." Stanley says in complete understanding. "You take care of Peacock. We'll head back to the lab."

Big Band lowered his head, his hat covering his eyes at the mention of Lab 8. "The Doc...didn't make it out. So now I've gotta track down Peacock, the Skullgirl, and his killer. I'd say I was earning
my pension tonight, but somehow I don't think Lab 8 offers a retirement plan."

A little joke from Big Band sparked a smile from Stanley. "I like to think we offer other benefits." He replies to humor his statement.

Even Big Band got a laugh out of their little exchange. "Ain't that right?" He then turned his back to the group, it was time for more investigations. "Later, Whitefin."

"Be careful, Ben." Ileum said in concern with the children at her side. "Come back to us in one piece."

He looks back to the group over his shoulder, getting a good look at them, they were the future of the kingdom and there was no way he was going to let them or Avian down. Big Band gives them a definite nod and shoots off into the sky with his rocket boosters.

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**Connecting the Pieces**

It all adds up to this fateful night. Lightning flashed in the sky as Marie used her power to attack Medici Tower, the damage was colossal and building was split in two as a result, the Medicis suffered a crushing blow and were severely crippled now that Marie's wrath was unleashed so unexpectedly. Black Egrets arrived at the scene and helped evacuate the citizens to the safe zone, downtown was a war zone and the sky was decorated with skeletal remains and debris, the most notable however was the blue Theonite tubes emitting from Marie.

Down below Peacock, Avery and their friends took refuge in an alleyway, once the brick and rubble stopped raining Avery peaked from out of hiding, his eyes were drawn to the blue sky where Marie is seen above all else, holding the top half of Medici Tower with her amazing strength.

"SQUAWK - I see her, boss!" Avery exclaimed now that they found their target. "The Skullgirl is right over there!"

Hearing this Peacock pokes her head out from cover and caught glimpse of the Skullgirl, and while she was looking forward to this her hopes of slaying the supposed monster was dashed as she realized who was waiting for her. "Wait...! It can't be...!" She got a closer look and saw that it was Marie, there was no mistaking it.

She couldn't believe it, after all this time getting ready and being fueled by vengeance Peacock found herself unable to comprehend her newly conflicted emotions, Marie was her best friend, beyond Peacock was Patricia at soul and this revelation struck where it hurt most, she was created to kill her friend. Peacock slowly walks out of the alleyway, driven by the incomprehensible truth that stood before her.

"...Marie? She's the Skullgirl?" The softness tone she used was all her friends needed to hear to know she was hurting.

At the same time the commotion caught the attention of Big Band, who rushed to the scene and landed on one of the rooftops. "What in the hell was that!?" He was in utter shock that Marie was capable of displaying such power, he had never seen such a young Skullgirl and being this powerful meant trouble.

Suddenly the shadowy apparition of a man took form beside Big Band, Brain Drain had finally shown himself, spectating the Skullgirls display of power.

"The Skullgirl has revealed herself - and her attention is fixed elsewhere. She may have destroyed..."
Lab 8, but she now has found a more fitting target for her wrath. Join me." He turns to face Big Band.

"I want to see New Meridian cleaned up, but not like this... Damn!"

"This is the perfect opportunity. While her attention is fixed on keeping that tower aloft, she is vulnerable. We must strike immediately, and decisively. You will engage the Skullgirl with Painwheel." The aforementioned ASG weapon reluctantly makes her appearance known, albeit reluctantly. "The Skullgirl will not be able to retaliate - and should be no match for a coordinated assault from two ASG units.

Big Band looks down to the silent girl and then over to Brain Drain's shadowy figure. "No dice." He declines with no intent on even giving it a thought. "Do you know how many people will die if we do it your way, and she drops the tower? We've got her in our sights now. It's only a matter of time before we take her down. We can do it without collateral damage."

"That is of no consequence." Brain Drain coldly remarks. "The only thing that matters is destroying her before her power further awakens."

This logic sickened Big Band and he snarls, he looks down to the city below and sees the innocent screaming for their lives while desperately trying to flee the area under the guidance of the Black Egrets, of which had more units incoming.

"You know, if I couldn't see your big damn brain, I'd be asking myself if you even had one." Big Band replied rebelliously.

Brain Drains eye narrowed at the man, feeling a bit of spite for this conflict. "This is your response after you cost us Avian? The only miscalculation I've made is in attempting to work with another soft-hearted fool from Lab 8. Avian, at least, served the cause by creating weapons to battle the Skullgirls - even if those weapons have obvious flaws. Mine are not so weak." He was clearly referencing Painwheel, he even held out his arm to the girl to show what he meant. "Painwheel, it falls to you. Go now - attack the Skullgirl."

Against her will Painwheel was nearly ready to take action but Big Band steps in front of her to decline her intent. "Nope. I don't think so." Killing the Skullgirl at the cost of innocence put Brain Drain on Ben's blacklist, any associations they once had was now gone. If it meant they had to be enemies then so be it.

"If we must go through you, then that is what we will do. Painwheel, destroy this defective tool, and do it quickly. You must pursue the Skullgirl before we lose our chance."

With what little willpower she had left she claws at her mask with bleeding finger nails, it looked like she was trying to claw the thoughts out of her head. "Stop...ordering me..." She mutters in a minor act of resistance.

"Do it. NOW."

His command came with a painful shock, his appearance retracted into the girl and she screams in agony, the eye holes in her mask glowing an intense red. She turns around and faces Big Band with murderous intent.

Back on the ground Peacock was on her knees, still staring into the sky at Marie as she summoned skeletons to help her keep the Medici Tower afloat. Avery and the others tried to bring her around but nothing they did would sway her.
"Boss? Hey, boss? Is everything ok?" Andy asked in concern.

"Yeah. We've finally got her in our sights so let's just kill her already!" Avery added.

Peacock's response was just silence, her friends didn't know Marie so they didn't know the weight of this reveal, but at the same time Peacock had to do something and her mind was filled with thoughts of Avian, the very man who saved her from certain death and gave her a second chance. She didn't know why her friend was the Skullgirl but eventually she had to be stopped, the title Skullgirl only brought with it destruction and who better to put an end to it than a friend? A friend who was given purpose to destroy her.

"I'm sorry, my child, but your reunion with Marie will have to wait." A sinister and demonic voice crept up from behind the group, approaching them was Double under the guise of Peacock herself. "She has important business to attend to in the Grand Cathedral."

"...Another Peacock?" The youth comments with a blank expression, she wasn't impressed. "Looks more like a dodo to me...extinct!"

"Enough!" Double's voice was a bit out of character, it was one of frustration and anger when she's usually always...well, it's quite indescribable, but that form of negative was often void. "Avian's legacy ends now."

While Double confronts Peacock and Big Band was locked in his duel with Painwheel the Medicis were making a last minute getaway while Marie was busy with the top half of their tower. This wasn't all that was going on, while they didn't know it this event brought together most of the pieces needed to complete the puzzle, all the key players were now present in the city, the Skullgirls rage has even brought forth the awakening of a special soul.

"Lorenzo...Medici!" Marie called out to them, catching the attention of everyone in the city. "Don't you dare turn your back on me... Or this empire you built on your victims graves...! I...WILL...DESTROY YOU!" Marie's anger was growing rapidly at the sight of the Medicis airship fleeing the chaos.

Using her power Marie was able to throw the tower an impressive distance, aiming it for the ship and away from the city. The tower was able to strike the airship but to a lesser extent than Marie had hoped, only destroying a large chunk of the engine.

The tower fell into the nearby sea, resulting in a gargantuan splash that would go on to soak a good portion of New Meridian, while the Medici ship spiraled out of control to an unknown location much to Marie's dismay. These events served as a good enough distraction to give Big Band the edge he needed to deliver a strong enough blow to render Painwheel into a submissive state.

In Painwheel's defeat Brain Drain's ghostly appearance resurfaced from her body. "You should have defeated a relic such as this one easily. I saw to that. But I can sense your resistance, Painwheel. I had thought you were the perfect vessel - but, sadly, you yet require refinement." His taunting words didn't do much to help the girl, whether or not she was actually paying attention while sitting on her knees was unknown. "You've wasted my efforts. Return to Lab 0 immediately for reprogramming.

"NO!" She exclaimed but to no effect on her mental puppeteer.

"I will expect you shortly. Obey my command or suffer the consequences. I will tolerate no further disappointment."

His figure once again fades out of being and Painwheel remains sitting in dismay, life was just
getting harder and harder for the poor girl, everyday she slipped further out of her own control.

Big Band realized she was being physically manipulated and was at ease now that she was in this state of calm, or at least what appeared to be calm, he looks to the sky and sees no sight of the Skullgirl, she got away just as Brain Drain predicted if they had wasted any more time.

Ben approached Painwheel and crouched down to meet her at eye level, or at least the best of what he could provide, she still had to look up to him from this sitting position.

"You don't have to listen to him, girl." Big Band said in a gentle tone.

Though she was initially hostile toward him she softened up, she wasn't a killing machine unless under Brain Drain's influence so there was that. "Who...are you?" She asked weakly.

"I'm just another Anti-Skullgirl soldier. The difference is nobody tells me what to do. And if you let us help you, it could be the same for you. While that knucklehead was runnin' his mouth, I called a friend, Leduc. He'll be here soon, and he'll take you somewhere safe."

Big Band stayed with Painwheel until Leduc arrived himself, all to make sure nothing bad befell the poor girl. Once Leduc arrived he inspected her and saw how much of a bad condition she was actually in, he couldn't help but feel sorry for her, but other than that her fight with Big Band proved to have done little in terms of damage, but this was to be expected, the veteran knew how to handle a fight.

"They've done some terrible things to her... You want me to take her back to Lab 8's crew?" Leduc asked after taking one last gander at Painwheel.

"Yep. Ileum will know what to do."

Leduc picked Painwheel up in a bridal fashion, she was too weak to move on her own and soon lost consciousness in his arms. Seeing that she was out the boy looks to Big Band who was looking out to the district in its ruined state. "What are you going to do?" He asked.

"Me? I've got to track down the other one before she gets herself killed. And now I know where she'll be."

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**A New Cycle**

**New Meridian**

**Present Day**

At sunset the expansive river that surrounds Central Meridian displays a breathtaking sight — the water sparkles magnificently as the river's surface reflects the sun's majesty while it slowly disappears below the horizon, visibly appearing that it was sinking into the watercourse. Onshore the Player is watching in peace on a lone outdoor observation deck by the bay, for once enjoying the magic he usually never had time to.

"It feels nice not having to be the protagonist for once." The bright smile on his face was a giveaway of his chipper mood, amazing what a lazy day could do for someone like him.

There was another who accompanied him, Marie, who was visibly awestruck at the sunset. While taking in the sights she begins to reflect on herself and realized she was becoming too attached to the Player, something she's been trying to avoid since his arrival but his consistent attempts at trying to branch out and establish a friendship between them has admittedly softened the Skullgirl up.
"Hm?"

"Your role in all of this. You don't owe it to us to be here, you don't have to get hurt for the sake of those connected to the Skull Heart. You can be free and not have to worry about anything."

This certainly came out of nowhere, she had been quiet throughout most of their time together and only now does she break the silence. For Marie she couldn't bear the heartbreak she's endured before becoming the Skullgirl, back when she was in No Man's Land before the Grand War, her ties to the Player frequently reminded her of Patricia and the painful memories that came with it, if she were to fully embrace him as an ally she feared what would befall him in the imminent chaos.

The Player noticed she was looking rather disturbed but she turns her back to him and takes a few steps forward to hide her conflicting emotions, a trait she's been void of for a while now.

"Where's this coming from, Marie?"

"...I...I just don't want anyone else taken. For all the power I have I'm not strong enough to go through that again."

She faces him once more to meet his eyes, they stood there in silence until the winds of spring brushed by them, offering a gentle breeze to help ease the moment. The Player could see she was still hurting and knew she was only concerned for his well-being, a concern he was grateful for, but at this stage in development and how far he's come there was only one answer he could offer, he ends up smiling and walks over to her.

"I can't do that." He answered.

"Why not?"

"It's just...I can help so many people in ways I never thought possible. It wouldn't be right to just leave you all after coming this far, and besides I promised to help fix things. I have to stay. what's happening is a lot bigger than me so I'm here to play my part and see it through. I've got something worth protecting here — that includes you."

There was a storm ahead - one that was beyond his comprehension but his heart remained strong, the bonds he's forged made certain his will wouldn't have a reason to falter, Marie respected that, but even still she wanted to debate in order to protect him from the looming danger that could very well take his life, but at the same time she wanted to be at his side, along with the others connected to the Skull Heart, to give destiny the fight of a lifetime: if fate deals you an unfair hand then you then you fight for a better one, one that you create for yourself, his interactions with Filia and the others taught her that. Perhaps it was time for a change.

Marie inhales then sighs. "You must have a death wish." She reaches into her apron's pocket and pulls out the same heart accessory he gave to her as a gift. "...But I'll make sure nothing bad happens to you. I promise." She smiles at him, showing genuine happiness in her expression.

**Threads of Fate**
**RECONNECTED**
Six months ago, specifically a few days after Marie had openly assaulted the Medicis in New Meridian, the mafia had withdrawn to a safehouse far away from their New Meridian underworld.

Vitale stood before the mafia an expensive mahogany desk while Black Dahlia stands guard beside the chair occupying a man clad in shadow thanks to the room's lighting. A mechanical butler serves the mysterious man a glass of scotch.

"So, how are things back in New Meridian?" He asked Vitale as he takes up the glass. Based on the rugged tone of his voice he was up in age.

"The damage was quite heavy." Vitale explained. "The Medici Tower has suffered a critical blow and it'll take some time for repair."

The man takes a sip from his glass and gently sits his drink down. "And the Skullgirl?"

"Still no sight of her." Vitale answers with a bit of regret in his voice.

There was a brief moment of silence and in that time the man takes another drink and holds the glass in hand. "I spend a fortune paying off the proper individuals to make sure my business was protected and yet all I get is INCOMPETENCE!" He slams the scotch down and begins to cough profusely.

"Sir, please, mind your health." Black Dahlia suggests in concern.

His grasp on the glass tightened in frustration. "I built this empire and I'll be damned if I'm going to lose it. If that Skullgirl wants war she's got a war."

"Boss..." Vitale speaks up while taking a step forward. "Do you think it's wise for us to initiate an attack while we're at a disadvantage? The Skullgirl has us outmatched and her rage only seems to grow stronger with each passing day. Not to mention you're not in the best condition right now."

"Another failure you shame me with." The old man bitterly responds. "The Life Gem is meant to be BACK in my hands. If I had it then I wouldn't be in this sorry state."

Hearing this rendered Vitale speechless. "Boss, I-

"I told you I would've gotten the job done." Dahlia interrupts him with a cold glare. "You sending that pathetic foster child of yours cost us greatly."

"You told me?" Vitale questioned in an elevated tone. "You don't tell me shit! You're nothing but muscle!" There was obviously some hostility here, most likely stemming from Vitale's current feelings of failure for the mafia. He had even displayed this toward Cerebella once she came back empty handed.

The old man held his hand out to calm him, seeing this Vitale collected his thoughts and stood formerly. "...Yes. I've heard about that. You got your hands on the 'Player', correct?"

"Yes, sir." Vitale answered.

"And even with his aid the mission was a failure?"

"Yes, sir." He repeats.
The elder sat back in his chair with his hands clasped together in a thinking posture. "...This Skullgirl isn't ordinary. Even with his power our forces weren't successful. I doubt you could've handled the situation, Dahlia."

She wanted to argue against this to prove her worth but she kept smart and held her tongue, only responding with a soft gasp initially. She straightens herself and remains tall. "I understand." She states calmly.

"...We've got our HQ hit by the Skullgirl, the Life Gem in the hands of that goddamn Feral and I'm here waiting for things to fall back in place." He sighs heavily at the current turn of events but looks on the bright side, having more than one trump card. "Alright. We'll continue to lay low for a while but we still have work to do. Vitale, we need to keep the Player under our control without bringing him into our circle. He remains muscle for us and nothing more."

"Got it." Vitale nods.

"I fear if things keep getting worse we may have to call on Eliza." The old man's suggestion caused an unsettling silence to befall the room. "Make sure you keep surveillance on him so we don't have to resort to that blood thirsty psycho. Keep him in the dark but if he digs too deep into things you know what must be done."

Vitale nods once more. "Of course. I already have the perfect candidate for keeping tabs on him. Should be no problem with that."

"Good. Don't fail me again." Vitale clenches his fist just hearing his demands. "Now get out of here."

Without saying a word Vitale places one hand over his chest and respectfully bows to the elder. Afterwards he sees himself out and closes the door behind himself.

A/N: For those who already played all the stories in Skullgirls (and the Skullgirls Encore re-release) this chapter is already familiar. The purpose of this is to connect the pieces of each character's story leading up to the events of Marie's rampage against the Medicis in New Meridian, y'know, since a lot of their stories were active around that time it would be impossible for the Player to work his way into their scenarios since he was already caught in the middle of Parasoul and Squigly's story during the attack on Medici Tower.

So we covered a little bit of Valentine, Big Band, Peacock, Marie, Painwheel and to a lesser extent Beowulf, the stage is set to have more of these characters in the future when they're needed, I don't want to force them into the story if they aren't required or don't serve a particular purpose in what chapter I have planned since I already have most of them mapped out, like Beowulf coming out of retirement taking place in just a few days time doesn't make sense to me so I wanted to wait months in advance to make it feel more believable.

I purposely left the outcome of Peacock vs Double ambiguous because I need to figure out how I'm going to handle that in the future considering how things played out in the actual game and how things later went in this story: like we know in Skullgirls Peacock defeats Double in her story but here Double was around long enough to encounter Squigly when Squigly was on the verge of dealing the finishing blow to Marie and by the time Big Band arrives at the Grand Cathedral it would've been destroyed by Samson and Leviathan, and at the time Marie is too weak to have her Theonite readings be picked up, or sensed, since everyone thought she was
dead after she used all that power in the city, even the Black Egrets were still looking for her.

It'll all come together, I'll just have to think on it and backtrack a bit more. I might have to wait to see more origin stories from Skullgirls Mobile before then, by the way if you haven't already check out Skullgirls mobile what are you waiting for? Go play it! It's free and gives us a lot more Skullgirls.

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